On 19th October 1968, there was a fairly large arrival of passerines at Spurn Head, East Yorkshire (now Humberside), associated with south-easterly winds. The main species involved were thrushes *Turdus*, Robins *Erithacus rubecula* and Goldcrests *Regulus regulus*, with a scattering of various warblers, including a Greenish *Phylloscopus trochiloides* and a Pallas's *P. proregulus*. On the next day, with fresh southerly winds veering to the southwest, there was a general decrease, and by 21st, with fog and very light variable winds, most of the grounded migrants had moved on. By late morning, the mist-nets at the point were catching no birds, so BRS and F. C. Gribble began furling them. All except the last were empty; that one, set on the east side of the peninsula, held a small *Sylvia* warbler which neither BRS nor FCG was able to identify immediately. It was taken back to the bird observatory, where a full description, measurements and photographs were taken.

**Plumage**

Forehead, crown, nape, mantle, rump and uppertail-coverts grey, washed brown; lores grey, with slight orange-brown mark between lores and crown; cheeks grey, faintly washed brown; fairly broad white moustachial stripe; orbital ring off-white. Lesser coverts grey, tipped very pale brown; median and greater coverts faded brown, broadly edged rufous on outer webs; bastard wing brown, with outer web broadly fringed pale buff; primaries and secondaries faded brown, broadly edged rufous, with tips of inner primaries pale fawn; tertials faded brown, with paler brown fringes. Chin off-white; throat and upper breast white, tinged grey-buff, with richer buff at sides of breast; lower breast, belly and undertail-...
Spectacled Warbler

coverts off-white; flanks warm buff; underwing-coverts white, washed buff. Tail feathers (left half) all old, outermost dirty-white, with proximal two-thirds of inner web pale grey-brown and the rest faded grey-brown, with paler tips to penultimate and next innermost; (right half) penultimate and next innermost new, being dark grey-brown, with narrow white fringes to outer webs and broad white tips; rest of feathers old and same as equivalent ones on left.

Bare parts: Eye pale brown. Bill: upper mandible dark horn, with cutting edge pale horn; lower mandible greyish-horn, with darker tip. Tarsus dark flesh; soles of feet dull ochre, tinged green.

Measurements: Wing 60 mm, tail 54 mm, tarsus 18 mm, bill 11.5 mm and weight 8.5 g at 12.00 GMT. Wing-formula: 1st 2.5 mm longer than primary coverts, 3rd and 4th longest, 2nd — 2.5 mm, 5th — 0.5 mm, 6th — 2.0 mm, 7th — 4.0 mm, 8th — 6.0 mm; 3rd, 4th and 5th emarginated and 6th indistinctly; notch on inner web of 2nd primary 14 mm from tip.

By reference to Williamson (1964), the bird was identified as either a Subalpine S. cantillans or a Spectacled Warbler S. conspicillata; the broad rufous edges to its flight feathers showed that it was the latter, a species new to Britain and Ireland.

When released in a sallow Salix near the observatory, the warbler moved quickly through and flew to some teaplant Lycium growing on a bank, where it perched in the open, facing away, but looking over its shoulder. It was watched by BRS, FCG, J. R. Collman, M. Densley, G. Hainsworth, R. D. Hind, C. W. Holt, R. Kaye, J. S. Kenyon, C. E. Lynch, R. J. Rhodes, T. Stevenson and Mr and Mrs K. Wilson. It resembled a small Whitethroat S. communis, with greyish head, white throat and rufous patch on the wing. After a while, it turned round, cocked its tail briefly, and dropped out of sight. On the following day, it was seen 2 km south of the observatory and, on 23rd, at Ghalk Bank, about 1 km farther south. On 26th, it was found again, in a tangle of scrub sea-buckthorn Hippophae rhamnoides still farther south, where it remained until last seen on 31st.

On 26th, JC gained the impression of a dingy Whitethroat: the upperparts were fairly dark grey-brown, greyer on the head; the underparts were greyish-white, washed brownish on the lower breast and flanks; and the outer tail-feathers were conspicuously white in flight. The bird's small size was shown by the fact that, when first seen from the front, it was thought to be a Phylloscopus: this resemblance was remarked on by Sharrock (1962). On 30th, BRS had good views again: at first sight, it looked very much like a Lesser Whitethroat S. curruca, with grey head (but not darker cheeks), grey-brown back with a rufous patch in the wings, and dark tail with prominent white outer feathers. The bird's habits, however, were more like those of a Subalpine Warbler: it often kept its tail cocked. On 27th, C. Massingham had also likened the bird to a Lesser Whitethroat and noted its habit of raising and cocking its tail.
Distribution

The breeding range of the Spectacled Warbler is more or less restricted to the Mediterranean basin, and is always very local. In the western Mediterranean, the species' main headquarters, the nominate race is found in the Iberian peninsula, southern France, peninsular Italy, the major islands, Tunisia, Algeria and Morocco (to the south of the Atlas Mountains), and it extends into Mauritanian populations on the Canary Islands, Madeira and the Cape Verde Islands were regarded by Vaurie (1959) as a separate race, *S. c. orbitalis*; the Spectacled Warbler probably also breeds in northwest Libya (Bundy 1976). Farther east, it is more thinly distributed, breeding for certain only in Cyprus (Stewart & Christensen 1971), Jordan (Benson 1970) and southern Israel (Safriel 1968, R. F. Porter *in litt.*), although probably also in Lebanon (Benson 1970), Sinai and northeast Egypt (Etchécopar & Hûe 1967), and possibly in the Libyan desert (Bundy 1976). Records are apparently very few on the north side of the eastern Mediterranean, the only published ones we have been able to find being two in Yugoslavia (Matvejev & Vasić 1973), six in Greece (Bauer et al. 1969) and three in recent years in southern Turkey (Ornithological Society of Turkey 1975, R. F. Porter *in litt.*), all in spring or autumn, with no evidence of breeding.

Movements, usually described in the literature as local (e.g. Etchécopar & Hûe 1967), take place in the autumn. Most of those from north of the Mediterranean apparently cross to the south, although some can be found in the Camargue throughout the winter (Dr J. Blondel *in litt.*). The species is widespread in Libya from October to April (Bundy 1976) and can be found in many places in the Sahara, probably extending to the southern limits. It occurs in Egypt and Sinai in winter and is common in the desert around Azraq (Meinertzhagen 1954). The Cyprus population scatters in winter and some may leave the island (Stewart & Christensen 1971). Similarly, fewer are seen in Malta in winter, suggesting that some leave the islands; no passage migrants or winter visitors have been detected there (Sultana et al. 1975).

Discussion

Considering its restricted and local range well to the south of Britain and its normally short-distance movements, the species seems an unlikely one to occur in Britain. But are its movements longer than suspected? Species with wider distributions often have leap-frog migrations, the populations breeding farthest north tending to winter farthest south. If Spectacled Warblers behave in a similar way, the birds breeding in, for example, southern France will be the ones frequenting the Saharan oases in winter, thus undertaking journeys of up to 2,000 km. Movement by the western Mediterranean populations appears to be north to south. So, accepting the hypothesis of reversed migration as put forward to explain the vagrancy of various eastern species in northwest Europe (Rabol 1969), the occasional Spectacled Warbler is to be expected in northwest Europe in autumn. There have been extralimital records in Europe on Heligoland on 10th September 1965 (Vauk 1972), at Porthgwarra, Cornwall, on 17th October 1969 (Jobson 1978) and on Christiansø in the
Baltic Sea, Denmark, on 20th September 1976 (Rabol & Pihl in press). There are no records of Spectacled Warblers in France north of the known breeding areas (E. Gruon in litt.), but some have appeared occasionally in the north of Italy, where they do not breed (Brichetti 1976).

The wing-length of the Spurn bird (60 mm) was just outside the theoretical range (49-59 mm) given by Williamson (1964), but within that (53-62 mm) for those in the Camargue (Swift 1959). In addition, the tail:wing ratio of the Spurn bird (90%) is more likely to refer to one from the north of the species' range than from the south (mostly 98% or over in North Africa) (Williamson 1964).

There had been high pressure over France and the western Mediterranean since 17th October and, by midday on 19th, this had moved northeast to Germany and combined with a high over southern Scandinavia. From early on 20th, it formed a large area of high pressure over central Europe and, by late on 20th, was giving southerly winds along its western edge, over France and extending into the southern North Sea. The low weight of the Spurn individual (8.5 g), compared with those breeding in Cyprus (9.0-10.0 g, for birds with wing-lengths of 52-55 mm: Jeal 1970), suggested that it was a new arrival.

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Summary
The first Spectacled Warbler Sylvia conspicillata recorded in Britain and Ireland was at Spurn Head, Humberside, on 21st-31st October 1968. Its weight and measurements suggested that it was newly-arrived from the northern part of the species' range.

References
Spectacled Warbler


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