

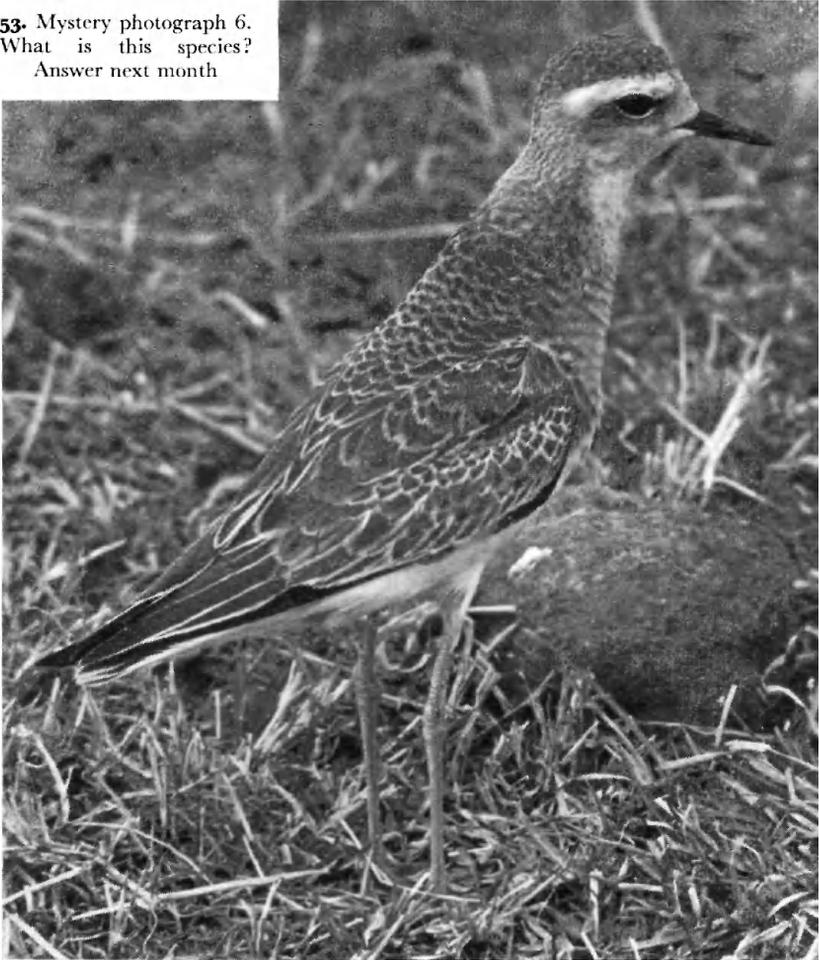
Mystery photographs

5 By comparison with the hand, the warbler (plate 35, page 163) is clearly small; it has a thin, weak bill and thin legs, plain upperparts and looks rather featureless: apart from the long, conspicuous supercilium, it so closely resembles a Chiffchaff *Phylloscopus collybita* that there is little problem in placing it in the same genus. The most distinctive features, however, are the plumage coloration, behaviour and call, none of which can be seen in the photograph: there was ample excuse for those who failed to identify it! Told now, however, that it is brown above and whitish below, tends to feed on the ground and skulk, and has a 'tacking' call-note, it will be recognised as a Dusky Warbler *P. fuscatus*. This one, photographed by Malcolm Wright, was caught on the Calf of Man in May 1970 and found dying near Limerick in December 1970 (*Brit. Birds* 64: 361).

The Dusky Warbler is about the size of a Chiffchaff, but with even shorter wings, at most hardly reaching the tips of the tail-coverts; the tail is slightly rounded, not notched like the Chiffchaff's, and can look short. A drab, skulking and silent Chiffchaff is much more likely to be misidentified as a Dusky Warbler if the plumage coloration, head pattern, wing/tail shape, leg colour and call are not carefully checked. The whole upperparts are brown, cold or warm in tone depending on the light, slightly brighter on the rump, and completely lacking any greenish or rufous. The underparts are cold white or creamy, washed with grey especially across the breast. The flanks, underwing and undertail-coverts are washed with buff or rust in varying strength. The supercilium is rather long and whitish, sometimes tinged rusty at the rear, over a dark stripe through the dark eye. The bill is fine and similar in proportions to a Chiffchaff's, the lower mandible has a yellowish base, and the gape is yellow; the legs are pale.

The call-note is quite atypical of the genus, a rather loud, definite, hard 'tack' or 'tek', like the human 'tutting' of disapproval, but harder, with the 't' dominant. Usually uttered singly or sometimes twice, it may also be used in flight in the manner of a Wren *Troglodytes troglodytes*. The calls most often draw attention to its presence, and allow the bird's movements in cover to be followed. My notes on the one at Dungeness, Kent, in November 1967 refer to a flight shape recalling a Blue Tit *Parus caeruleus*, due to the rounded wings and short tail. These differences were well shown in the picture of a Chiffchaff and a Dusky Warbler together in the hand in East Sussex in October 1974 (*Brit. Birds* 68: plate 45a). This species keeps low in cover, but is also often very active, with much wing-flicking, especially after alighting. This and Radde's Warbler *P. schwarzi* are the rarest of their genus in Britain. Dusky totals 18 records up to the end of 1975, all but one in autumn and 16 in the 29-day period between

53. Mystery photograph 6.
What is this species?
Answer next month



13th October and 10th November. The notes on the 17 since 1961 have enabled a thorough assessment of the species' field characters. It is perhaps the most nondescript of a rather plain genus, but, given reasonable views and its call-note, it is fairly easy to identify. Past allusion to its similarity to Radde's Warbler is now widely contradicted, notably by R. J. Johns and D. I. M. Wallace (*Brit. Birds* 65: 497-501): the major points which identify Radde's are the olive or greenish-toned upperparts, yellowish or buffish underparts (without any hint of rusty), longer tail, stout bill and more prominent, cleaner supercilium. The call-note is similar, but usually softer and less far-carrying, and such adjectives as 'quiet' or 'nervous' are often used to describe it.

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