The fact that October 1987 was a 'classic Scilly October' was scant comfort to me, since I had arrived on the Isles of Scilly just too late to see both a Philadelphia Vireo *Vireo philadelphicus* and a Hermit Thrush *Catharus guttatus*. To add insult to injury, my friends had trapped a Blyth's Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus dumetorum* near my home in Tynemouth, Tyne & Wear, on the day that I arrived on the islands. On 22nd October, a drab Yellow-browed Warbler *Phylloscopus inornatus* was reported on Gugh (the small island to the east of St Agnes, accessible by a causeway at low tide), and, on the following day, my father, Tom, and I went there to look for migrants. We had covered most of the moor on the south side of the island, and were coming back to the central fields when we saw a small *Phylloscopus* warbler, flicking through the brambles *Rubus* along the southern edge of the fields. We watched it for several minutes, and were completely perplexed. It looked superficially like a Yellow-browed Warbler, with an obvious supercilium and two wing-bars, including a broad greater-covert bar. It showed no sign of any pale tertial edges, however, and it had dark legs, and a pale bill which we thought may have been slightly larger than that of a Yellow-browed Warbler. We discussed whether it could be an adult Yellow-browed, perhaps with the pale tertial fringes worn away, since neither of us was aware of the moult strategy of that species, but we were still at a loss to explain the bare-part coloration. In addition, it seemed to have a longer tail than we
expected. We took full notes and retreated back to St Agnes.

While we were away, pandemonium had broken out on St Agnes, with a Booted Warbler Hippolais caligata, a Red-rumped Swallow Hirundo daurica, and a strange Rufous Nightingale Luscinia megarhynchos near the Post Office (Bradshaw 1996). Nevertheless, I collared Alan Dean, John Ridley and Pete Lansdown to talk through the warbler which we had just seen on Gugh. We were soon able to eliminate aberrant Yellow-browed Warbler, since the freshness of the rest of the plumage ruled out the possibility that the tertial edges might be missing through wear. While none of us was particularly familiar with Greenish Warbler P. trochiloides of the race plumbeitarsus ('Two-barred Greenish Warbler', and referred to as such hereafter), there was enough in my description to convince everyone that we needed another look, even though the tide was on its way in. Pete, Tom and I set off, and spent the high-tide period over on Gugh, during which time we managed superb, prolonged views of the bird, and obtained a series of photographs sufficient to confirm its identification as Two-barred Greenish Warbler.

The next day, the bird showed well to all those who were able to visit Gugh, and it remained on the island until 27th October.

**Description**

**General** A small, bright, active Phylloscopus warbler, reminiscent of both Yellow-browed and Greenish Warblers. Compared with Yellow-browed Warbler, it seemed slightly larger and longer-tailed, it had a more obvious neck, and it also lacked the constant motion of that species. Compared with Greenish Warbler, it appeared to have a larger head and to be slightly more pot-bellied.

Head and neck Crown olive-green with a grey cast, darkening slightly towards the lateral edges. There was a prominent yellow supercilium, flaring behind the eye, where it was broad and very striking, before narrowing again with a suggestion of an upward kink onto the nape; in front of the eye, the upper border was somewhat less distinct, and with a slight indentation, making it slightly less obvious there. There was a thin, very dark eye-stripe in front of the eye, which became broader and paler behind the eye, and there was a distinct yellow crescent below the eye. The cheeks were smudged grey, and the throat was white.

**Upperparts** The mantle and rump were olive-green, slightly greyer than the crown. The wings were generally of a similar colour, but without the grey cast. There were bright green edges to the secondaries and tertials, while the primaries were dark, with bright edges on the proximal two-thirds. The median coverts were tipped white, forming an indistinct wing-bar that was more obvious on the left wing. The greater coverts were dark-centred, with broad green fringes, and with broad, square, creamy tips forming an obvious, wide wing-bar that reached right across the whole width of the greater coverts. There were bright green edges to the tail, most obvious near the base of the feathers.

Underparts The underparts were sullied white, with grey smudging on the sides of the breast. There was some yellow present on the sides of the breast, near the wing-bend.

Bare parts The bill was predominantly pale, with just the culmen and tip of the upper mandible dark. It was perhaps slightly longer than that of Yellow-browed Warbler, but this was not a noticeable feature. (Some observers thought that the bill looked long, but this is not supported by the photographs, which suggest that the bill was relatively small). The legs were dark grey-brown, with the feet less grey and more brown.

**Call** I did not hear the warbler call, but others reported hearing it give a slurred, sparrow-like 'chirrup'.

**Discussion**

The identification of this bird was, at the time, quite challenging, since most observers' experience of the taxon, if they had any at all, was limited to a few individuals in spring, in Siberia. The perception of those Siberian birds was quite at odds with the warbler on Gugh, particularly in relation to the grey cast. In addition, most of the ones which I had seen had been singing, relatively high up in tall trees, and had therefore offered little opportunity for close study. Two-barred Greenish Warbler was also somewhat outside the mind-set of most British birders, and even Ian Wallace (1980) had failed to predict it as a likely vagrant (though less than a year later, in 1981, he would have done: *Brit. Birds* 74: 100). This latter point was amply demonstrated when I telephoned the news through to the Porthcressa that evening: 'Two-barred Greenish? - never heard of it, mate! Are you sure you know
what you're talking about?' Once everyone had seen the photographs, of course, the identification became straightforward. By the next day, everyone knew that it could not be an adult Yellow-browed Warbler, since that species has a complete post-breeding moult and therefore adults in autumn appear similar to young birds (including tertial edges). This situation was in marked contrast to that on the day of discovery, when Alan Dean was the only person who seemed sure of the species' moult strategy.

In terms of field characters, Two-barred Greenish Warbler occupies the overlap zone between Yellow-browed Warbler, Greenish Warbler of the race viridanus and Arctic Warbler P. borealis. In fact, while taxonomically most closely related to the second of those three, it is perhaps just as likely to be confused with Yellow-browed Warbler, although most European field guides highlight Greenish Warbler (i.e. viridanus) as the main confusion species. The presence of square tips on all the greater coverts (forming a broad whitish wing-bar), and a short median-covert bar are the key differences from Greenish Warbler. These two features, however, together with an obvious supercilium that broadens behind the eye, give Two-barred Greenish Warbler more than a passing resemblance to Yellow-browed Warbler. Of course, the size, the lack of white tertial edges, the call, and the bare-part coloration can all be used to separate the two. In addition, Two-barred Greenish lacks Yellow-browed's dark base to the secondaries that contrasts with the pale greater-covert wing-bar.

Two-barred Greenish Warbler is, perhaps, even more likely to be confused with Arctic Warbler, and in Hong Kong, where both species occur regularly, the identification criteria have only recently been clarified, and the true status of both taxa determined (Leader 1993). In China, the situation is complicated somewhat by the presence of Arctic Warblers with dark legs, which, to my knowledge, is not a problem likely to be encountered in western Europe. The head pattern of the two can be similar, with the supercilium not reaching the base of the bill, a strong loral line, and sullied cheeks with an obvious pale crescent below the eye. In addition, Arctic Warbler in autumn can often show a double wing-bar, although the greater-covert bar is rarely, if ever, as broad or as long as that of Two-barred Greenish. Furthermore, the supercilium of Arctic Warbler does not usually widen behind the eye, while the legs are usually strikingly pale, and the call is different (although see Bradshaw & Riddington...
1997). Common wisdom has it that Two-barred Greenish is very white below, but that was not the case with the Gugh bird, which had quite an obvious grey cast on the sides of the breast that, once again, recalled Arctic Warbler. There is also a suggestion that the legs of Two-barred Greenish Warbler can be paler than is suggested by the name plumbeitarsus (van der Vliet et al. in press), which may also add to the potential for confusion.

This 1987 observation represents the first accepted record of Two-barred Greenish Warbler for Britain & Ireland (Brit. Birds 86: 517). There has been a subsequent record, in Norfolk in October 1996 (Kemp 1996; Brit. Birds 90: 501), while BBRC is currently examining another that pre-dates the Gugh individual described in this paper.

References
Van der Vliet, R., Kennerley, P. R., & Small, B. In press. Identification of Arctic, Two-barred, Greenish and Bright-green Warblers. Dutch Birding.

EDITORIAL COMMENT Colin Bradshaw, Chairman of the British Birds Rarities Committee, commented: 'I found reviewing a record with which I have been so closely associated a somewhat bizarre experience. It was also interesting to see the comments of the Committee members at the time. Considerable doubts were expressed about four key aspects of the identification. Some photographs suggested that there were whitish tips and edges to the tertials (although this was not noted by any observer in the field), the bill seemed too small, and both the upperparts and the underparts seemed very grey-toned, which was at odds with the prevailing view at the time, namely that Two-barred Greenish Warbler was a very "green and white" bird. Concerned by these anomalies, BBRC members even discussed the possibility of Yellow-browed Warbler x Greenish Warbler hybrids! Photographs also showed fine "points" to the remiges and fectrices, which confirmed the age as a first-year, while at least one of the tail feathers was shorter than the rest, with fault-bars, doubtless the result of replacement of a missing feather.

'A more detailed analysis of the photographs suggested that the tertial markings, which seemed so clear-cut in some images, were, in fact, a photographic artefact, since they were absent in others. Furthermore, published biometrics indicated that, contrary to popular belief, the bill of Two-barred Greenish Warbler is of similar size to that of Greenish Warbler of the race viridanus. A detailed examination of skins was undertaken, and members came to the conclusion that there was a "pecking order" of identification features. Wing-bars which were broad, extending across all or most of the greater coverts and in a straight line proximally (rather than with crescent-shaped feather tips, typical of both Arctic Warbler and viridanus Greenish Warbler), and with broad tips to the median coverts, were the premier identification feature. The head pattern, with the supercilium only just reaching the bill base, might be a useful secondary feature.

'Because of the delay in publication of the details of this record, we can now compare the individual involved with a Two-barred Greenish Warbler seen at Wells, Norfolk, in 1996. This, too, showed initial similarities to Yellow-browed Warbler, and displayed a distinctly grey cast to the green crown and mantle, so perhaps this plumage feature is not particularly unusual for relatively fresh immatures. The Norfolk bird, however, apparently showed cleaner underparts and a longer bill than the Gugh bird.'

Tony Marr, Chairman of the British Ornithologists’ Union Records Committee, commented: This is an amazing file of descriptions, photographs, references, advice from consultants and contributions of substance from members of the BBRC and the BOURC. One of the BOURC
members, halfway through the circulation, wrote that "It is testimony to the difficulties involved that the general conclusion is likely to be that this record will be accepted without the 100% confidence that normally characterises such decisions, and that the taxonomic position of Two-barred Greenish Warbler remains uncertain." This reflects the problems encountered in confirming the bird's identity, through what Colin Bradshaw refers to above as the "pecking order" of identification criteria. These problems did not diminish when a consultant in Thailand wrote that he had "no reason to doubt that the Scilly bird was a Two-barred Greenish Warbler", and a consultant in Sweden wrote that he had "no absolute and firm view on the case".

'Another BOURC member summed up the overall difficulties by suggesting that there were two problems here: "Was it $\text{n plumbeitarsus}?" and "What is $\text{plumbeitarsus}?" There was, in fact, a unanimous vote for acceptance of the identification on a single circulation, albeit a lengthy one as members worked their way through the voluminous file and made their own enquiries and researches. Many questions were asked about the taxonomy since, at that time, following Voous, $\text{plumbeitarsus}$ should have been treated as a full species. The Taxonomic Sub-committee was then asked to examine the evidence for maintaining $\text{plumbeitarsus}$ (and $\text{nitidus}$, too) as a full species. The outcome of its deliberations was published in December 1992 in the Records Committee's Eighteenth Report (Ibis 135: 220-222). The statement is reproduced in full below, since it throws helpful light on several aspects of the record.

"Greenish Warbler $\text{Phylloscopus trochiloides}$. Add subspecies $\text{plumbeitarsus}$ Swinhoe to Category A: First-winter, Gugh, Scilly, 22nd-27th October 1987: sight record; photographed (Brit. Birds 81: 95 and in prep.; see also Twitching 1: 333-336, Birding World 3: 430). This race, known as Two-barred Greenish Warbler, breeds southern central and eastern Siberia, Mongolia, and north-eastern China. It winters in southern China and South-east Asia south to peninsular Thailand. The race has also occurred in the Netherlands, first-winter, 17th September 1990 (Dutch Birding 14: 7-10, 83). Voous (op.cit.) treated $\text{plumbeitarsus}$ as a separate, monotypic species, but recent evidence suggests that it might be better placed as a race of $\text{trochiloides}$ (Glutz & Bauer 1991, Handbuch der Vogel Mitteleuropas, 12/11 Passeriformes (3. Teil), Wiesbaden; Mild 1987, Soviet Bird Songs, 2 cassettes & booklet, Stockholm; Svensson 1992, Identification Guide to European Passerines, 4th edition, Stockholm). $\text{P. nitidus}$, known as Green Warbler, which is on the British and Irish list on the basis of a record in 1983, should similarly be treated as a race of $\text{P. trochiloides}$ (Svensson 1992). Further research on this group of warblers is desirable."

See also the paper by Martin Collinson on pages 278-283-