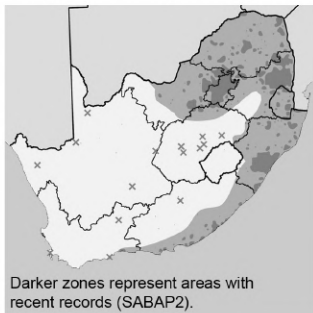


# Marsh Warbler

*Acrocephalus palustris*

Length: 13-15cm

Weight: 8-17g in subregion, with average 11,5g. Up to 23g in breeding range.



**Abundance:** Very common but secretive. **Migration:** Northern breeding grounds vacated late July through August. Majority follow a route over the Eastern Red Sea, but some birds pass through Egypt. A stopover zone is visited for two to three months. Despite probably holding the entire world population for this period, the exact stopover range remains undiscovered (suspected stopover range shown in purple on the map). Birds leave the stopover range from late October to mid January. Peak passage through Kenya in mid November to mid December. Arrivals in Southern Africa from late November with peak arrivals in December. Some records from October exist, but the majority of records prior to late November probably constitute miss-identified African Reed Warblers encountered in dry habitats.

**Giss and structure:** A medium sized long-winged warbler. The steep forehead and rounded crown together with the slightly shorter and heavier bill gives it a less attenuated head profile than in similar species. Its body is moderately heavy but appears tapered due to long wings and the long, full undertail-coverts that create a smooth transition between body and tail. The tail is graduated and appears rather broad, however, apparent greater broadness than in similar species may be an illusion caused by tail colouration. Tail appears shorter than in resident Acros due to smaller tail to wing length ratio (71-79%, avg. 75%). Primary projection 80-90% of exposed tertials with 8 primary tips visible. Wing tips extend past rump, but do not extend beyond uppertail-coverts. In flight silhouette is elongated with the wings long and pointed.

**Plumage:** *Adult fresh (late summer):* The upperparts are a greyish olive brown showing a greenish tinge. Rump and uppertail-coverts are very slightly paler than the mantle but show no increased warmth or richness. Throat white and a faint yellow wash is present on the chest and flanks. The pale creamy buff supercilium is rather distinct before the eye and sometimes extends faintly behind, with an indistinct eye stripe sometimes present. A pale eye surround is created by the prominent eye ring and supercilium. The dusky loreal spot is only moderately contrasting. Primaries show prominent white tips and the dark tertial centres contrast with pale margins. Tail quite dark and contrasts with the pale upperparts, accentuating broadness. *Adult worn (early summer):* Upperparts paler with the greenish tinge greatly reduced. Some birds may show a slightly more noticeable yellow wash. Underparts are whiter with the yellow wash restricted mainly to the flanks. White primary tips are lost with wear. *Juveniles:* Slightly warmer and browner than adults. Underparts may be more liberally washed yellow, but due to the effects of wear this may not be noticeable in subregion.

**Bare parts:** Legs pale flesh-coloured to yellowish brown. In rare cases juveniles may show dark legs. Bill dark above and yellow to pinkish below and the inside of the mouth is orange.

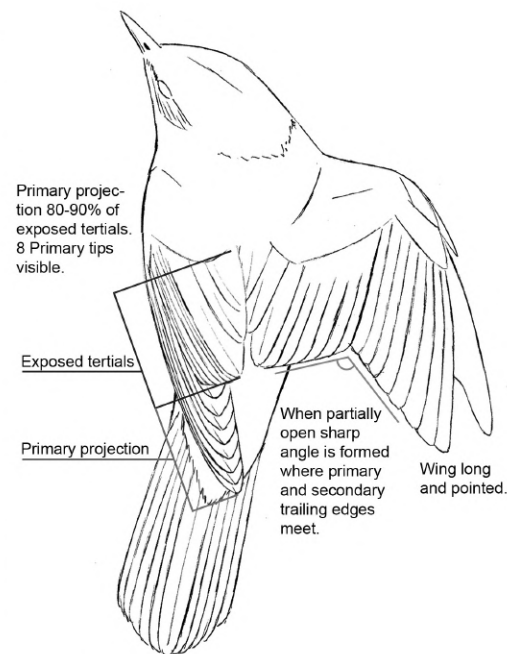
**Behaviour:** Hyperactive. Restlessly forages while giving contact calls or singing. The body is held horizontally while moving through tangles and gleaning insects off leaves. Lifts fore-crown feathers when excited/alert and quickly flicks wings and tail in uncoordinated fashion, but does not pump tail in a rhythmical fashion. Forages at low to medium levels, primarily in herbaceous vegetation and bushes, and less frequently in tree canopy. At times forms loose groups. When disturbed may simply move out of view rather than flushing.

**Habitat:** Prefers dense thickets, herbaceous growth and bushes in a variety of woodland types, mainly in moist savannah biome. Particularly fond of areas with increased vegetation density, such as valleys, areas near watercourses, densely vegetated slopes, forest edge etc. Often found in grasses and other low vegetation such as the invasive Blackjack (*Bidens pilosa*). Not a wetland species.

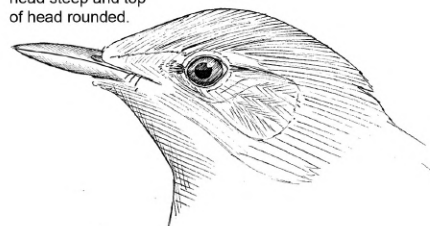
**Voice:** Contact call a nasal tssst, tzzzt or tzit, with a harsher tchurr sometimes given when alarmed. Song fast, squeaky and has little structure or rhythm. Song comprised mainly, at times entirely, of mimicry. Mimics a variety of species in rapid succession without structure. Species from both European breeding and African wintering grounds is included in an extensive repertoire of up to 84 species. Song often gets lost in the calls of other species due to its unobtrusive nature and lack of easily recognisable motifs. May sing for hours at a time, particularly prior to northward migration when both frequency of calling sessions and volume are increased.

## Separation from similar species

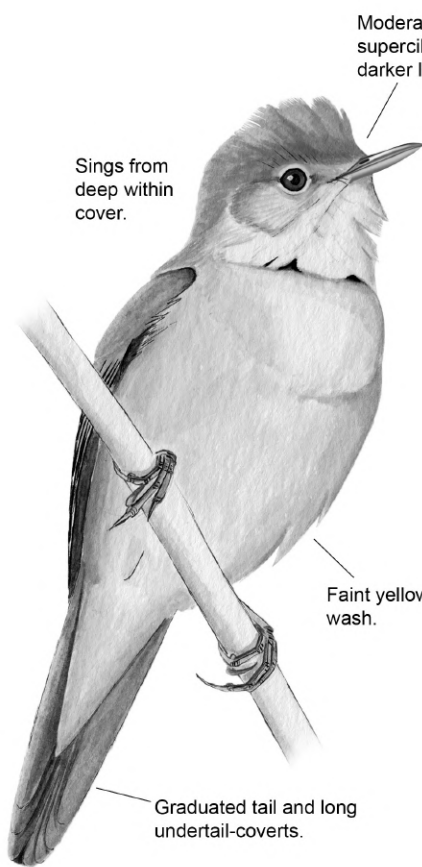
**African Reed Warbler** has warm brown upperparts that are usually darker and more richly coloured showing a characteristic cinnamon tinge. Facial pattern on average slightly different with supercilium less pronounced and lores more contrasting. Legs dark brown rather than pale. Structure similar but slightly lighter build and shorter wings gives it a less full bodied appearance. Tail appears longer in relation to the short wings. Primary projection much smaller at 40% of exposed tertials. Forehead flatter and bill longer giving a more pointed head silhouette. Prefers wetlands and areas near watercourses, but may at times be found in dry habitats frequented by Marsh. With experience more grating quality of contact call may be used to distinguish it from Marsh. Rhythmical grating song different. **Garden Warbler** is larger and has a dumper body. The head is more rounded and the bill is shorter and heavier. Lower mandible and inside of mouth less brightly coloured. The sturdier legs are usually dark grey. Facial pattern much plainer and lacks a strong supercilium in front of the eye. Upperparts are cooler grey to grey brown and yellow wash less extensive than in Marsh. Mainly forages at medium to high levels and is less hyperactive. Song similar but lower pitched and more "bubbling", containing little mimicry. **Icterine Warbler** is larger and has longer wings, a square tail and a peaked crown. Legs are blueish black. Differences in plumage include pale lores, a bright yellow face and underparts (note exception of rare pale morph), and a diagnostic pale secondary wing panel. Prefers tree canopy and does not readily forage in lower herbaceous layer. **Willow Warbler** is smaller with a rounded forehead and tiny bill. Tail notched. Leading edge of carpal area (shoulder) yellow. Thigh feathers may also be yellow. Calls not confusable.



Bill rather short and heavier than other small Acros. Forehead steep and top of head rounded.



Typical adult leg colours (left and centre) and dark legged juvenile (right).



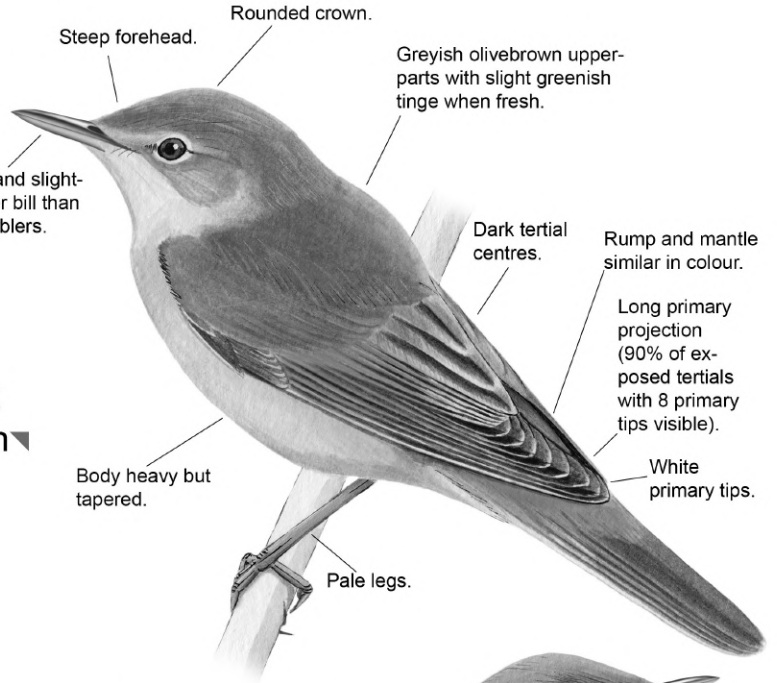
Sings from deep within cover.

Moderately prominent supercilium and slightly darker loreal spot.

Faint yellow wash.

Graduated tail and long undertail-coverts.

### Adult Fresh



Steep forehead.

Rounded crown.

Greyish olivebrown upperparts with slight greenish tinge when fresh.

Shorter and slightly heavier bill than reed warblers.

Dark tertial centres.

Rump and mantle similar in colour.

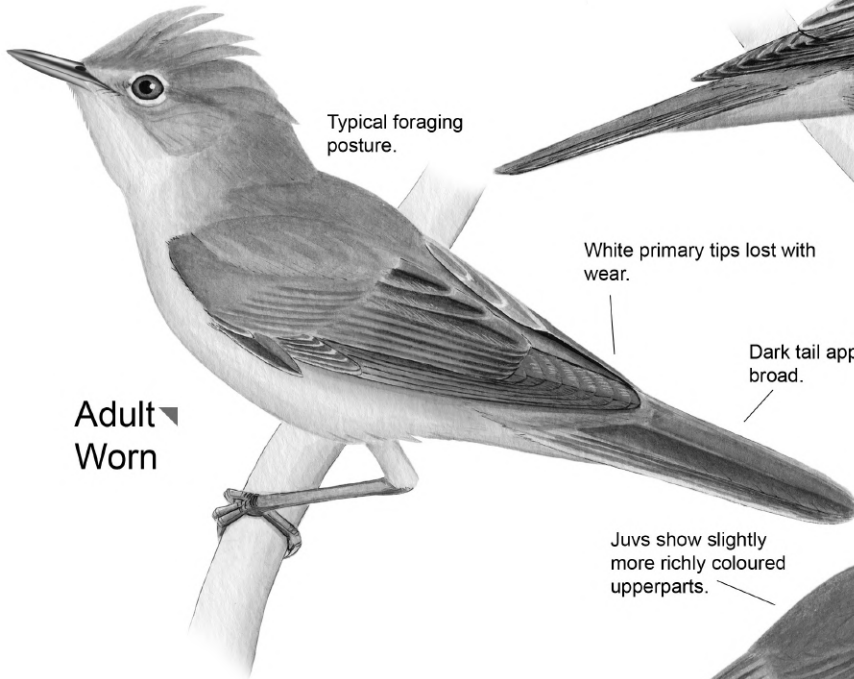
Long primary projection (90% of exposed tertials with 8 primary tips visible).

White primary tips.

Body heavy but tapered.

Pale legs.

Habitat, steep crown and long wings may cause confusion with *Hippolais* and *Iduna* spp.

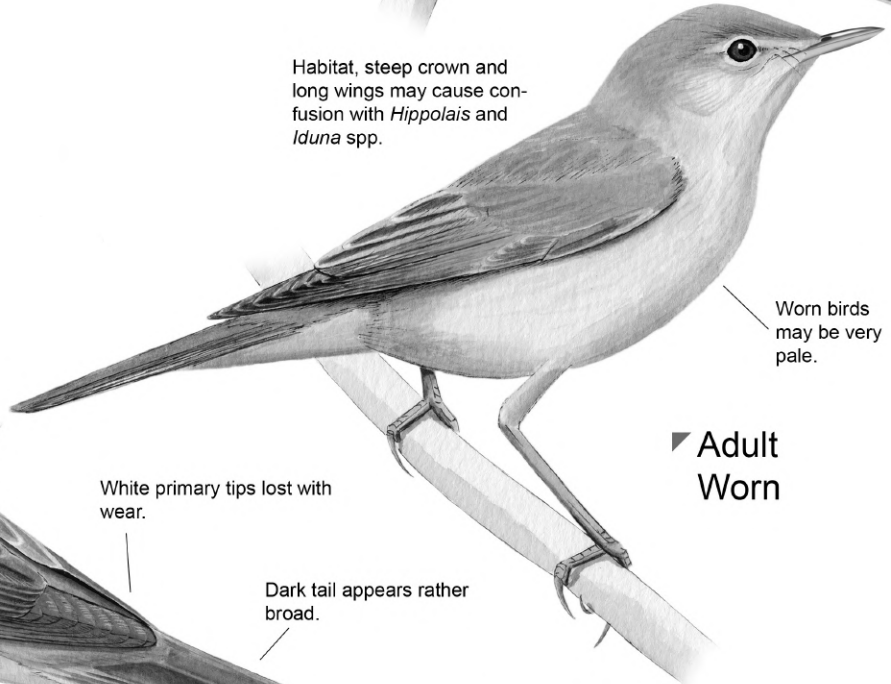


Typical foraging posture.

White primary tips lost with wear.

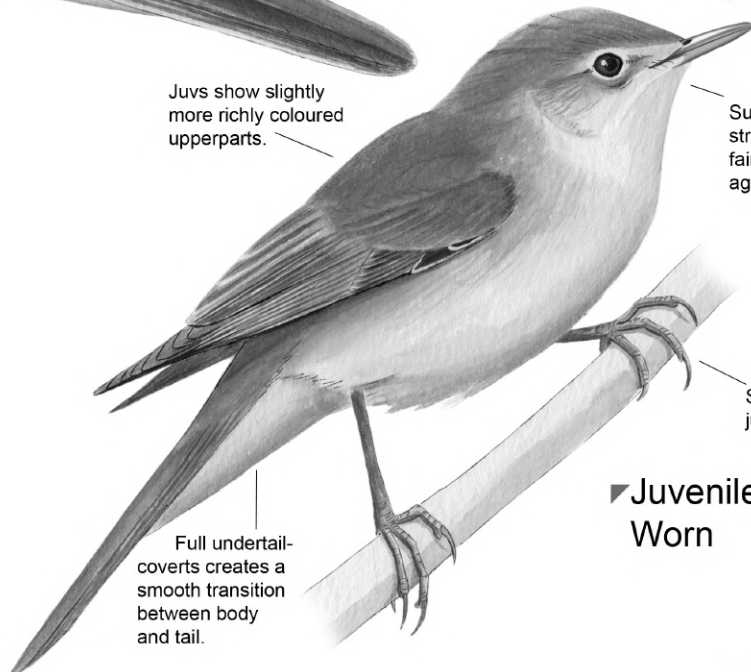
Dark tail appears rather broad.

### Adult Worn



Worn birds may be very pale.

### Adult Worn



Juvs show slightly more richly coloured upperparts.

Supercilium and eye stripe often extends faintly behind eye (all ages).

Slightly darker legs in juveniles.

### Juvenile Worn

Full undertail-coverts creates a smooth transition between body and tail.