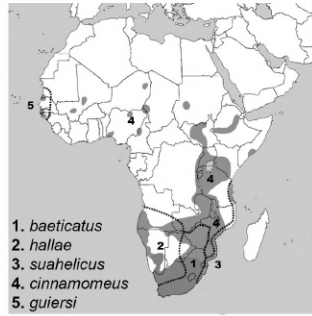
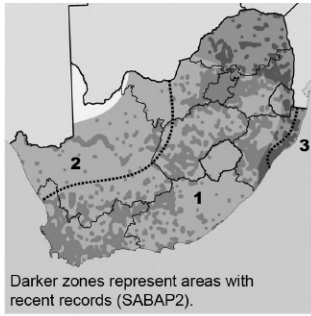


African Reed Warbler

Acrocephalus baeticatus

Length: 12-13cm

Weight: 7,5-15g Avg. 10g



Abundance: Very common. **Migration:** Resident north of 26deg S. Migrants arrive late August and depart for central Africa late May. Sightings of resident birds greatly declines in winter, possibly due to unobtrusive nature during this period.

Subspecies occurring in South Africa: *A. b. baeticatus* (Nominate) Largest ssp. with warm brown plumage showing slight cinnamon tinge. *A. b. hallae* shows paler plumage and is slightly greyer than other ssp. *A. b. suahelicus* is a smaller ssp. with slightly rounder wings. Plumage more rufous than nominate.

Giss and structure: A medium sized warbler with short wings. The flat crown and forehead along with the medium length bill gives it an attenuated and pointed head silhouette. When the crown feathers are lifted the length of the bill is accentuated and gives the impression of a longer, thinner billed bird. The body is lightly built and tapered, with the long, full undertail-coverts contributing to the tapered silhouette of the rear body. The tail appears longer than in palearctic migrants due to a greater tail to wing length ratio (77-88%, avg. 83%). Primary projection 40% of exposed tertials with 6 primary tips visible. Wing tips do not extend beyond rump (only perceivable in hand). The tail is graduated and the undertail-coverts extend down approximately half the length of the tail, with the exception of *A. b. Cinnamomeus* which has slightly shorter undertail-coverts. In flight the body appears elongated with the tail transitioning almost seamlessly into the body silhouette. The wings appear rounded and medium in length.

Plumage: Adult fresh (early summer): Upperparts are warm brown with a cinnamon tinge. The rump and uppertail-coverts are slightly warmer and more richly coloured than the mantle. A rufous wash is present on the flanks and the chest and sides are washed liberally with yellow contrasting with the white throat. When in leafy cover the ambient lighting may accentuate overall warm tones and the yellow wash to the underparts. The yellow brown to creamy buff supercilium is moderately distinct to rather indistinct and most prominent in front of the eye, with at most only a hint behind. The dark loreal spot is moderate to strongly contrasting. The wing feathers lack any notable markings, and while pale primary tips are present, these are far less contrasting than in Great reed or Marsh Warblers. The dark tertial centres also do not contrast strongly with the paler borders. Adult worn (late summer): Upperparts become slightly greyer and less richly coloured and underparts become paler. Juveniles: Very similar to adults but may be a touch warmer and more rufous, with the rump not noticeably more richly coloured than the mantle.

Bare parts: Legs dark brown to pale greyish brown with the tibia sometimes reddish. Soles yellow. The bill is dark above and yellowish to pinkish below with the inside of the mouth orange.

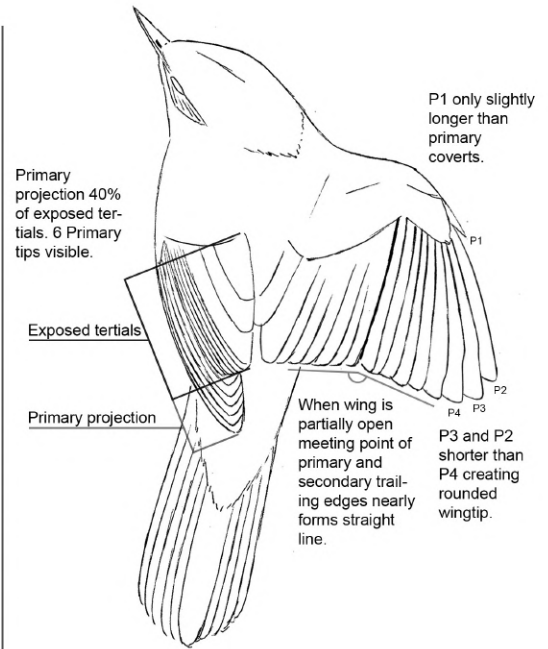
Behaviour: A restless warbler that forages with horizontal posture at medium to low levels in reedbeds and bushes, as well as the tree canopy in the riparian zone. When foraging, works from lower levels to upper levels, then quickly flies to the next bush or clump of reeds. Does not regularly forage at the water's surface. Often lifts crown feathers while foraging and when excited/alert. Less shy than similar palearctic Acrocephalids, particularly prior to breeding when birds may be seen loudly singing from exposed perches such as the tops of reeds, low hanging branches etc. When displaying, males adopt an upright posture with crown feathers lifted and white throat puffed making its head seem huge compared to its body. Males then chase females from perch to perch while singing constantly, even when accidentally falling in the water!

Habitat: Reedbeds at edges of wetlands and watercourses as well as other riparian vegetation. Tends to avoid stands of reeds in deeper water. Likely to be encountered further from water shortly after arriving in late August and September. During other times of the year birds may be found straying several hundred metres from reedbeds, but are not likely to be found in areas entirely devoid of watercourses/wetlands. Also utilises sugarcane plantations that act as pseudo-reedbeds. *A. b. hallae* is regularly found in dry watercourses and gardens in arid zones. *A. b. suahelicus* strongly associates with mangroves.

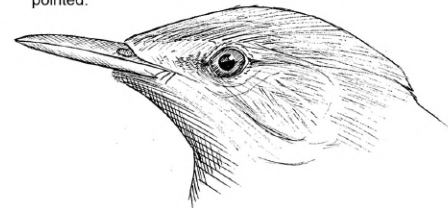
Voice: Contact and alarm calls a grating Tchurrr. Song is grating and rhythmical with individual sounds often repeated 2-4 times. May include some mimicry, but less often than Marsh Warbler.

Separation from similar species

Marsh Warbler is not found in reedbeds, however, both species may be found in dense vegetation away from water. Its plumage is paler and its facial pattern is slightly different, with the supercilium more distinct but the lores are less contrasting. Legs are pale. Marsh has a steeper forehead and rounder crown which, along with the shorter bill, gives it a less pointed head silhouette. The wings are notably longer and the primary projection is greater at 80-90%, making the tail appear shorter in relation. Marsh's contact call is less grating and more nasal. Its song is faster, squeakier, less grating and less repetitive. Separation on basis of one mimicked species recognized in song not advisable. **Lesser Swamp Warbler** is a noticeably larger species with a rounder head and dumper build. Shorter under-tail coverts combined with a heavier body gives it a less smoothly tapering silhouette, particularly in flight. On photographs the much longer outermost primary extending well past the primary coverts may be visible. Striking white supercilium with black lores distinctive. A small proportion lack a white supercilium, however, these birds usually retain black lores and still show a more contrasting facial pattern. Underparts white with rufous mainly limited to flanks. Legs pitch black. Contact call and song different. May fan tail slightly when excited. **Eurasian Reed Warbler** has negligible differences in plumage. Structure also practically identical, with the exception of a greater primary projection (70-80% with 8 tips visible) and a slightly longer bill. Songs identical. Likely only confidently separable in hand and from photographs showing wing structure. **Icterine Warbler** is more elongate with noticeably longer wings and a steeper crown. Tail square rather than rounded. The pale wing panels, lack of dark lores, blueish black legs and lack of warm brown in the upperparts further distinguishes this species from African Reed.



Flat headed with medium length bill. Head appears pointed.



Legs typically dark brown and soles yellow. Some show a reddish tint to tarsus.



In breeding season sings loudly from exposed perch.

Contrasting white throat when fresh.

▼ *Ad. A.b. baeticatus* ▼
Fresh

Rather strong yellow wash blending to more rufous flanks.

Long undertail-coverts and rounded tail.

Faint supercilium in front of eye and dark loreal spot.

Flat head.

Warm brown upper-parts with reddish tones.

Rump more richly coloured than mantle.

Short primary projection (40% of exposed tertials with 6 primary tips visible).

Dark brown legs.

Plumage greys with wear.

Bill length accentuated when crown feathers are lifted.

Underparts paler in worn birds.

▼ *Ad. A.b. baeticatus* ▼
Worn

▼ *Ad. A.b. hallae*

Appears longer tailed than palearctic migrant species.

More rufous than other ssp. Juveniles of nominate ssp similar.

▼ *Ad. A.b. suahelicus*

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