

Notes on the vocalizations of White-browed Shrike-babbler (*Pteruthius flaviscapis*)

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In the following we briefly analyze and compare voice of the different races of White-browed Shrike-babbler (*Pteruthius flaviscapis*). We also try to quantify the extent of any vocal differences using the criteria proposed by Tobias *et al.* (2010), as a support for taxonomic review. We have made use of sound recordings available on-line from Xeno Canto (XC).

Voice has already been analyzed in Rheindt & Eaton (2009), and was part of the evidence to split this complex as four BSC species. If we score vocal differences based on the measurements of voice (Table 3 p36, based on 30 recordings over 8 races, which is quite low), by applying Tobias criteria, we get:

* *ripleyi*: vs *validirostris*: score 2 based on longer intra-motif breaks, but score 0 vs two other groups.

* *annamensis*: shorter intra-motif breaks vs. *aeralatus*, but as this is part of group 'Blyth's', comparison with overall group gives score 0. Score vs. *ripleyi* about 1 and vs. *flaviscapis* score 0.

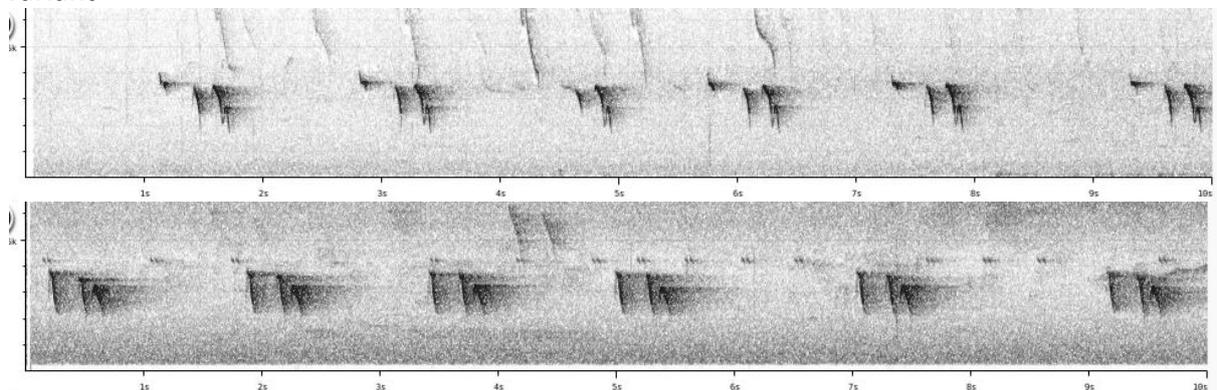
* *flaviscapis* vs. Blyth's group: score 0

Considering the limited number of samples, the wide variation of measurement results within recordings of the same race, and the minimal differences identified, the stated conclusions on vocal differences are rather weakly supported by data and, at least within the framework of quantification by application of Tobias criteria, vocal differences rather fall in the category 'minor'.

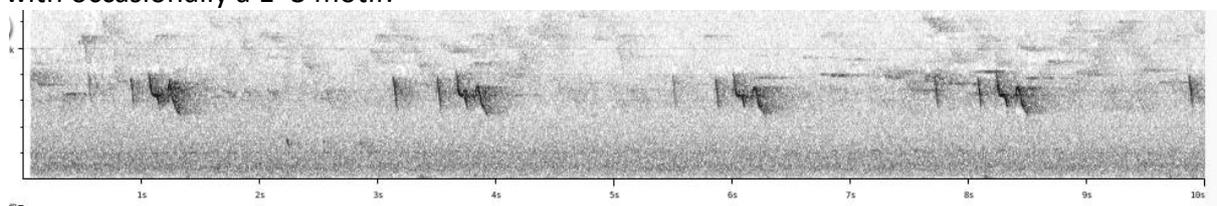
Since publication of this study, quite a few additional recordings have become available on XC.

Some confirm the statements in the above paper, e.g.

nominate *flaviscapis*: the rhythmic 1+2 phrase continues to be seemingly the only song variant



with occasionally a 1+3 motif:

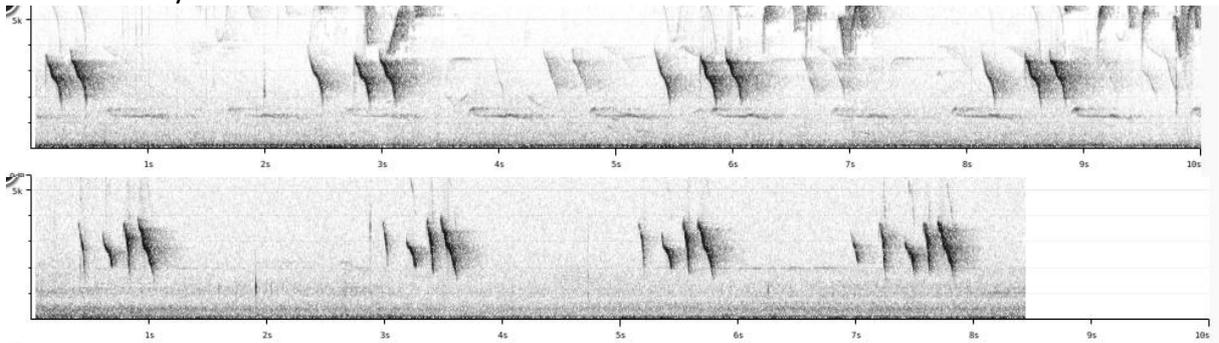


Others weaken the statements in the aforementioned study.

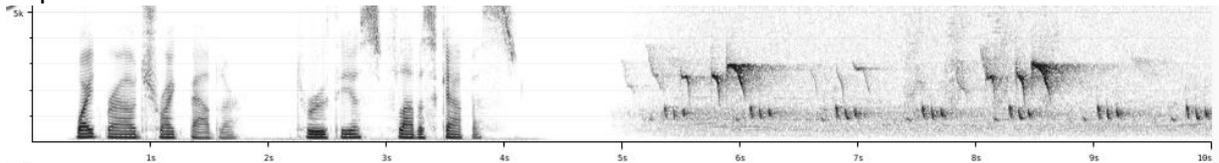
e.g. the claimed 'dramatic vocal break' between slow singing *ripleyi* vs. fast singing *validirostris* can no longer be maintained, as can be seen from the following sequence of sonograms from West to East:

'Himalayan Shrike-babbler' (*ripleyi*)

India Himalaya

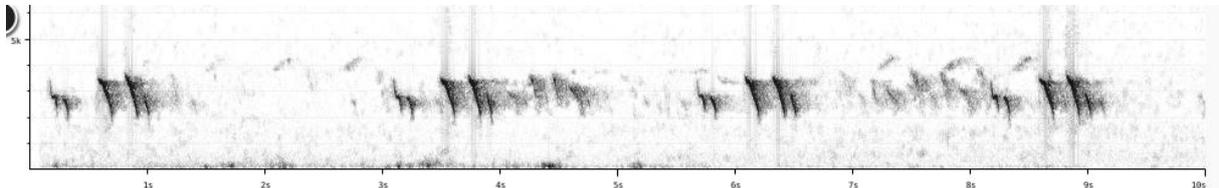


Nepal

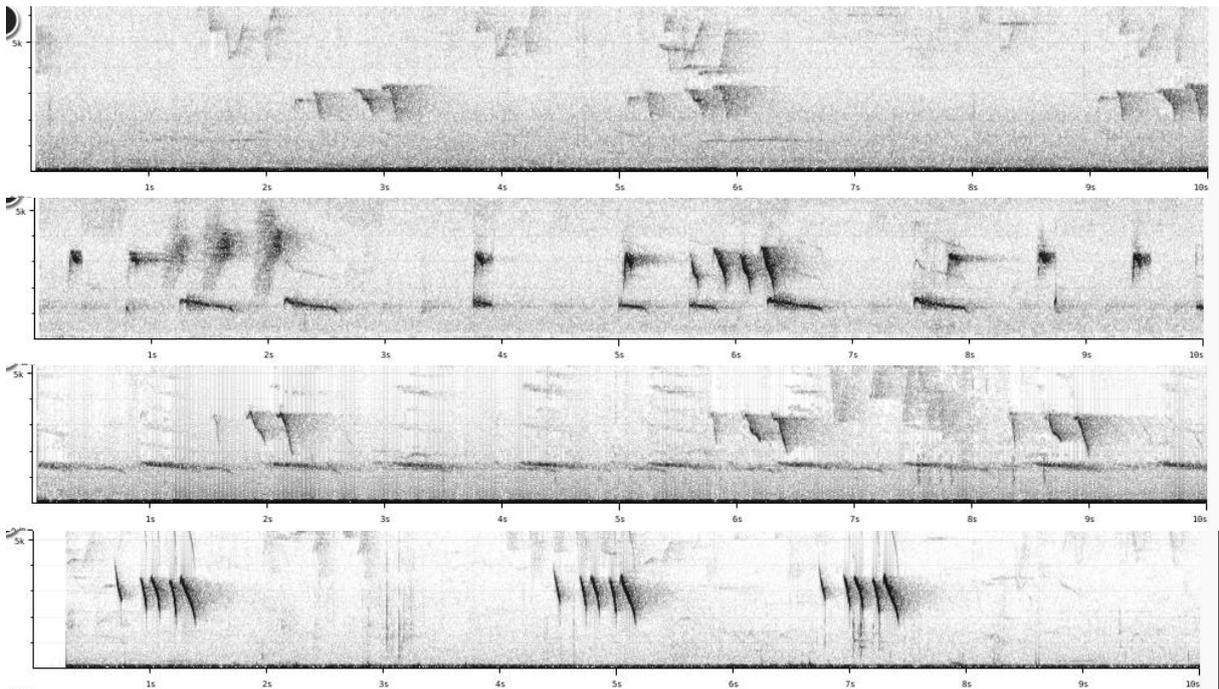


'Blyth's Shrike-babbler'

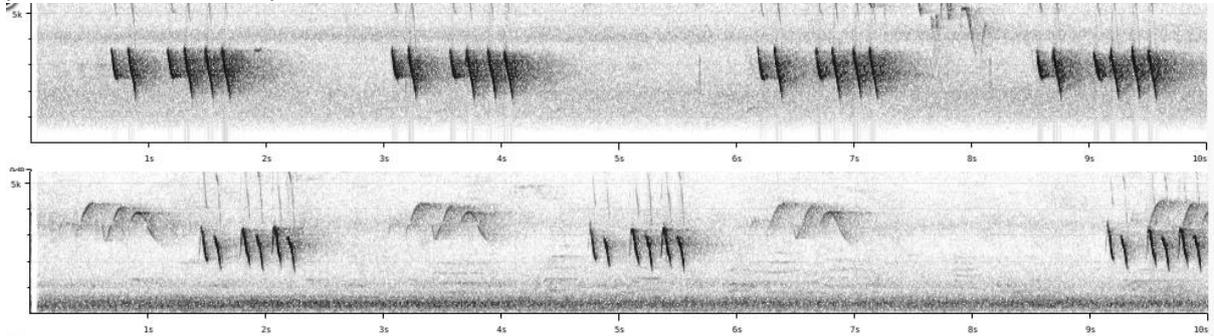
NE India



Bhutan



or: vocal divergence of 'Dalat Shrike-babbler' *annamensis* (top) vs. 'Blyth's Shrike-babbler' (bottom, from China):



With more recordings gradually becoming available, it would seem there is need for a new thorough vocal analysis, which investigates a higher number of (possibly more complex) parameters such as e.g. average delivery of x+y motifs (*annamensis* often utters a 2+3 or 2+4 song, *flaviscapis* 1+2) etc.

Nevertheless, given that there is little difference in the basic sound parameters, it seems unlikely that scoring according to Tobias criteria will lead to scores higher than 3 in pair-wise comparisons, and scores of any group vs. all other groups will obviously be lower.

This note was finalized on 30th January 2016, using sound recordings available on-line at that moment. We would like to thank in particular the many sound recordists who placed their recordings for this species on XC.

References

Rheindt, F.E. and Eaton, J.A. (2009). Species limits in *Pteruthius* (Aves: Corvida) shrike-babblers: a comparison between the Biological and Phylogenetic Species Concepts. *Zootaxa* 2301: 29-54.

Tobias, J.A., Seddon, N., Spottiswoode, C.N., Pilgrim, J.D., Fishpool, L.D.C. & Collar, N.J. (2010). Quantitative criteria for species delimitation. *Ibis* 152(4): 724–746.

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