

RANGE EXPANSION OF THE OLIVE-TREE WARBLER *Hippolais olivetorum* ALONG THE CROATIAN COAST

Širjenje areala oljčnega vrtnika *Hippolais olivetorum* vzdolž hrvaške obale

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The Olive-tree Warbler *Hippolais olivetorum* has a restricted range in the NE Mediterranean, breeding in the area stretching from the eastern Adriatic and southern Balkan Peninsula to the western and southern Turkey and Israel. It mostly inhabits coastal areas and islands, not ranging deep into continental hinterland (CRAMP & BROOKS 1992). It breeds in the areas of traditional agriculture, including olive-groves, orchards and vineyards, as well as stone-covered hillsides scattered with bushes and open-canopy oak trees (CRAMP & BROOKS 1992). It is a long-distance migrant, wintering in eastern Africa from southern Tanzania to northern South Africa (VATEV 1997), where it inhabits savannah with scattered *Acacia* trees, dry bushes and dry woodlands. Throughout the range, its occurrence is patchy and clustered, while in the northern part of its range the populations are even smaller and more widely dispersed (VATEV 1997).

In Croatia, the Olive-tree Warbler inhabits Dalmatia (REISER 1939, TUTMAN 1980, RUCNER 1998) including several islands, for example Dugi otok, Brač, Korčula, Mljet and Lastovo (ĆIKOVIĆ *et al.* 2006, CVITANIĆ 1984, RUCNER 1998, L. JURINOVIĆ & I. BUDINSKI *pers. comm.*). Usually, individual pairs or small clusters of 5–6 pairs are recorded (RUCNER 1998). The Olive-tree Warbler returns from its wintering grounds in early May (ŠTUMBERGER 2001, VREZEC 2001), but sometimes even in the second half of May; upon its arrival it can be observed in gardens or other non-breeding habitats (TUTMAN 1980). It spends less than four months at its breeding grounds, departing south in August, with the latest day of observation being 5th September (TUTMAN 1980).

Its breeding range in Croatia has extended during the last hundred years (KRALJ 1997). In the early 20th century it was recorded only in south Dalmatia, north to Metković and on the island of Korčula (REISER 1939). In central and northern Dalmatia, it

was recorded only after the 1950s (CVITANIĆ 1984, CRNKOVIĆ 1990, RUCNER 1998). The northernmost known nesting area was Murvice village near Zadar, where small breeding population was found in 1964 (RUCNER 1998).

During survey conducted between 2010 and 2012 in northern Dalmatia, we recorded singing males at several localities: in oak woodland close to Pokrovnik near the Krka river (43°48'N, 16°03'E) on 8 Jun 2010, in agricultural area of Dazlina near Pirovac (43°51'N, 15°44'E) on several occasions from 7 May to 6 Jun 2011 and from 9 May to 7 Jun 2012, and in an old olive grove near the SW border of Lake Vransko Nature Park (43°52'N, 15°34'E) on 20 May 2010. All these records confirm the existence of small scattered populations in northern Dalmatia. More intensive ornithological studies at Dazlina in 2012 revealed the density of three singing males in the area of 1.5 km². However, it should be noted that in spite of our daily presence in the field through the whole May and June, the song was heard infrequently. It is contrary to usually persistent singing during courtship and incubation, throughout night as well as by day and even in June heat (CRAMP & BROOKS 1992). Such low singing activity might be related to individual territories (not clusters) without auditory contact between males. It is known that singing rate of individual males might positively correlate with the number of simultaneously singing males (LAMPE & ESPMARK 1987).

North of Dalmatia, in the Primorje region, the Olive-tree Warbler was recorded in Crikvenica on 30 Apr and 1 May 2010, when one male was singing in the small park surrounding the Therapia Hotel (45.10°N, 14.41°E). Later in the same year, one male sang in an orchard at Rudelić Draga (44.27°N, 15.10°E) south of Karlobag on 11 May 2010. Both localities where checked in early June 2011, but the species was not observed. A singing male was recorded in Novi Vinodolski on 6 Jun 2011 (45.07°N, 14.48°E) (Figure 1). The song was heard from the rocky slope overgrown with bushes and low trees. In regard to the date that denotes the middle of the breeding season, this record indicates probable breeding of the Olive-tree Warbler in the Primorje region.

There are just few published observations of the Olive-tree Warbler north of Dalmatia at hand. One bird was observed in a small pine forest in Starigrad - Paklenica on 15 Jun 2000 (LUKAČ 2011). This species is considered a rare non-breeding vagrant in the Paklenica National Park area. Another record originates from the early 1990s from the Mirna valley in Istria (RUBINIĆ 1996). It is the northernmost

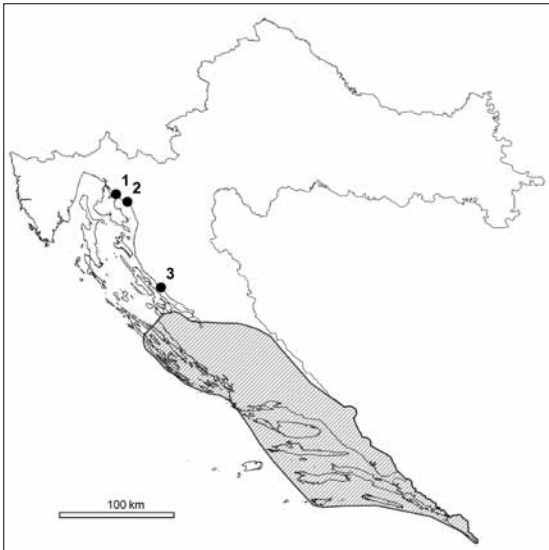


Figure 1: Singing localities of the Olive-tree Warbler *Hippolais olivetorum* in 2010 and 2011 in the Primorje region (Northern Adriatic) of Croatia. Grey hatching indicates the species' known breeding range, while dots show its singing localities: 1 – Crikvenica, 2 – Novi Vinodolski, 3 – Rudelić Draga.

Slika 1: Lokacije pojočih oljčnih vrtnikov *Hippolais olivetorum* leta 2010 in 2011 v Primorju (S Jadran) na Hrvaškem. S sivo šrafuro je prikazan znani gnezditveni areal vrste, točke pa označujejo naslednje lokacije: 1 – Crikvenica, 2 – Novi Vinodolski, 3 – Rudelić Draga.

record of this species in Croatia, and the oldest north of Dalmatia, but unfortunately no observation date and other details were given.

Two birds recorded in late April and early May in Crikvenica and Rudelić Draga cannot be interpreted as breeding males with certainty, as they were observed early in the season and neither were they confirmed in the ensuing year. However, in the light of low singing activity noted at Dazlina, these localities should be thoroughly checked in the future. As Croatia represents the northern limit of the Olive-tree Warbler's range, new records along the Primorje region indicate expansion of the northern limit of the species' global distribution.

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Povzetek

Areal oljčnega vrtnika *Hippolais olivetorum* je v SV delu Sredozemlja omejen; pojavljanje vrste je v njenem celotnem arealu neenakomerno in

gručasto. Znano je, da ga je bilo na Hrvaškem najti v Dalmaciji severno od Zadra, ko je bilo zabeleženih nekaj posameznih parov ali manjših skupin te vrste. Oljčni vrtnik prileti s svojih prezimovališč meseca maja in odleti proti jugu meseca avgusta. Sicer pa se je njegov areal na Hrvaškem v zadnjem stoletju močno povečal. V začetku 20. stoletja je bil zabeležen samo v južni Dalmaciji, in sicer severno od Metkovića in na otoku Korčuli, medtem ko je bil v srednji in severni Dalmaciji zabeležen šele po 50-ih letih prejšnjega stoletja. Med raziskavo, ki je potekala med letoma 2010 in 2012, so avtorji potrdili obstoj manjših razpršenih populacij v severni Dalmaciji. Nekoliko intenzivnejše ornitološke raziskave, opravljene leta 2012 na Dazlinskem polju blizu Pirovca, pa so razkrile pojavljanje treh pojočih samcev na območju, velikem 1,5 km². Zaznali so zelo nizko pevsko aktivnost, ki bi lahko bila povezana s posameznimi teritoriji brez zvočnega stika med samci. Poleg tega so teritorialne samce zabeležili tudi v Primorju severno od Dalmacije, in sicer 30. 4. in 1. 5. 2010 v Crikvenici, 11. 5. 2010 v Rudelić Dragi južno od Karlobaga in 6. 6. 2011 v Novem Vinodolskem. Glede na zadnji datum, ki označuje sredino gnezditvenega obdobja, lahko govorimo o verjetnem gnezdenju oljčnega vrtnika v hrvaškem Primorju. Ker Hrvaška oblikuje severno mejo areala oljčnega vrtnika, novi podatki o vrsti vzdolž hrvaškega Primorja kažejo na širjenje severne meje njene globalne razširjenosti.

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