

# SYLVIA NANA.

## Desert Whitethroat.

*Curruca nana*, Hempr. & Ehr. Symb. Phys. Aves, fol. cc (1828).

*Salicaria aralensis*, Eversm. Bull. Soc. Nat. Mosc., xxiii. pt. 2, p. 565, pl. viii. fig. 1 (1850).

*Sylvia delicatula*, Hartl. Ibis, 1859, p. 340, pl. x. fig. 1.—Salvad. Atti R. Acc. Sc. Torin., iii. p. 290 (1868).—

Blyth, Ibis, 1869, p. 29.—Hume, *tom. cit.* p. 355, et 1871, p. 32.—Id. Stray F., i. p. 199 (1873).

—— *Doriae*, De Filippi, Viagg. Pers., p. 348 (1865).—Tristr. Ibis, 1867, p. 84.

—— *nana*, Heugl. Orn. N.O.-Afr., i. p. 306 (1870).—Finsch u. Hartl. Vög. Ostaf., p. 244 (1870).

*Atraphornis aralensis*, Severtz. Turkest. Jevotn., p. 124 (1873).

PLAIN-COLOURED as this little Warbler really is, it is nevertheless a species of great interest, as it is nearly allied to our own familiar Whitethroats and to the Spectacled Warbler (*S. conspicillata*). It is evidently a species suited for inhabiting a desert country, whence its colour.

The present species has a very extended range, being found from Central Asia and North-western India right across to North-eastern Africa, as will be seen by the excellent note furnished me by Mr. Blanford, who has solved its rather confused synonymy by a careful comparison of types. I am likewise indebted to the same gentleman for the following account, which he had prepared for his work on the natural history of Persia:—

“I have examined the types of *Curruca nana*, Hemp & Ehr., at Berlin, and of *S. Doriae*, De Fil., at Genoa, and have confirmed the identification of these species with *S. delicatula*, Hartlaub, suggested by Von Heuglin and Salvadori. Specimens sent from Russia to the museums of London and Berlin as *Salicaria aralensis* also belong to this species; and the only difference I can find in the description of *S. aralensis* by Eversmann is that the feet are said to be light bluish (‘hell bläulich’) instead of dull yellow, a difference due possibly to Eversmann’s description being taken from dried specimens.

“I have shot *Sylvia nana* in Southern Persia and in Baluchistan—in the former in summer on a rather barren plain sparingly covered with small bushes; in the latter in winter amongst tamarisk-bushes near a water-course, the whole of the surrounding country being desert. The usual haunt of this little Warbler throughout its rather wide range appears to be either semidesert plains or bushes near water in desert countries. Von Heuglin found it ‘in dense salt-plant copses’ on the African coast of the Red Sea, near Berbera &c. The types of *S. aralensis* were said to be from reeds on the shores of the Sea of Aral and the Syr Daria (or Jaxartes) River. Tristram met with this species on a salt plain near the south end of the Dead Sea; Doria on a similar salt plain near Yezd in Persia; Jerdon and Hume in dry semidesert parts of North-western India, near Delhi, in western Rajpootana, and in Sind.

“Usually *S. nana* may be seen hunting about bushes and occasionally searching the ground about their roots. De Filippi, quoting Doria, says that it always remains on the ground, and that it has a habit of raising its tail. Its movements in general are somewhat *Drymæca*-like, as was observed by Von Heuglin; its flight is very weak and somewhat like that of the Willow-Wren. I did not notice its voice, which, however, has been described by Von Heuglin and Hume to be feeble, resembling that of a *Drymæca*.

“My notes on the coloration of the soft parts and on the measurements agree with the details given by Von Heuglin and Hume. The iris is golden yellow; bill dusky on the culmen, pale (almost flesh-coloured) below; legs dull yellow. The following are the measurements of a male taken when the bird was just shot:—Length 4·75 inches, expanse 7·25, wing 2·1 (in another specimen 2·4), tail 2, tarsus 0·8, bill from the gape 0·46.”

General colour sandy isabelline, slightly more rufous on the wing-coverts; rump and upper tail-coverts rufous fawn-colour, the middle tail-feathers also of this colour, with dark brown shaft-stripes; the remainder of the tail-feathers dark brown, margined with fawn, the penultimate one edged and tipped with white, the outermost feather entirely white; quills very pale brown, with light sandy coloured margins slightly mixed with rufous; inner secondaries with sandy white margins, paler than on the primaries; lores and circle of feathers round eye white, as also the cheeks; ear-coverts sandy rufous; entire under surface of body, including the under wing- and tail-coverts, sandy white, inclining to isabelline on the flanks. Total length 4½ inches, culmen ⅔, wing 2½, tail 1⅞, tarsus ¾.

There appears to be little or no difference in the colouring of the sexes, in which respects it assimilates to its European prototypes.

The figures in the accompanying Plate are supposed to represent each sex, of the natural size.