

Eastern Lesser Whitethroat, Hemsby, Sept 30, 2017, T.E. Allwood and R Irvine

The bird was first seen by Ryan in the hedge at the back of the campsite north of Beach Road. Ryan hadn't seen it well, but was of the opinion that due to the overall tones of the bird, it could be worth pursuing as an Eastern Lesser Whitethroat. The bird was then not seen for well over an hour. We checked all the hedges and small stands of trees around the campsite without success. Eventually we sat down in the middle of the campsite for a quick bite to eat. As we were having some lunch, we hear the bird call from the same area where Ryan first encountered it. However, the bird proved extremely elusive and was almost impossible to see. We quickly lost it before refinding it close by. It then flew to the conifer stand about 40 yards away. I picked it up low down and managed to get a shot or two. Looking at the back-of-the-camera shots, it certainly had a pallid tone to the mantle.

It then moved deeper into the trees and it was another 20 minutes or so before we managed to find it again. These brief views and movements carried on for a fair while and were extremely frustrating but eventually the bird returned to the northern hedge and became more cooperative, allowing us to observe it very well over a period of 2-3 hours.

The general tone of the plumage was of a warmer and slightly paler or sandier brown than a nominate *curruca*. This was present across the mantle and scapulars and onto the tertials, with a pale wing panel apparent times. This brown tone on the mantle could be seen to ride up on to the nape and rear crown of the bird. In a rear-on view, it actually appeared to be brown-headed and I managed to capture this on camera. The forehead and lores were grey, but in a highly magnified close-up shot, admixed brown feathering could be seen throughout. The ear coverts were remarkably changeable – at times hardly noticeable and plain grey, while at others they could be fairly distinct and dark. Overall, they were rather less prominent than on a nominate *curruca*.

The underparts similarly could transform when the bird was in strong, direct light, but in neutral conditions they appeared warm buff tone and contrasted sharply with the white throat. The bird spent a lot of time low down and even on the ground at times. It often looked quite mouse-like scrubbing around very low and was even reminiscent of a Desert Warbler or a true Desert Lesser Whitethroat such as I have seen in China and Tibet. Although the bird showed white in the tail, it was impossible to determine its actual extent. The call was given several times and sounded to be a typical Lesser Whitethroat *tak*.

The bird appears to fit the general impression of a *blythi* well. Although at times it looked diminutive, short-billed, rather short in the wing and mouse-like, it didn't appear long-tailed nor did it have the general jizz of a *halimodendri*-type bird.



