

First record of the Zitting Cisticola (*Cisticola juncidis* Rafinesque, 1810) in Hungary

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Abstract. On the 18th of July, 2006, one singing male individual of Zitting Cisticola (*Cisticola juncidis*) was observed at Lake Kolon, Central Hungary. It is the first record of this species in Hungary.

A new species was added to the list of the Hungarian avifauna on the 18th of July, 2006, when the first individual of the Zitting Cisticola (*Cisticola juncidis* Rafinesque, 1810) was recorded at Lake Kolon (46° 48'N, 19° 20'E). At a drying swamp meadow (*Molinion coeruleae*) the unmistakable zitting song of a male Zitting Cisticola was heard. Right after the acoustical detection, it was possible to visualize the individual perched on the stands of Purple Moor-grass (*Molinia coerulea*) as well as the Common Reed (*Phragmites australis*). A digital photo is presented (Figure 1).

All the typical identification characters such as the flesh-colored legs, the yellowish-brown back with contrasting black stripes and the tail feathers with dark subterminal coloring and whitish tips were possible to detect, providing a full positive identification (Baker, 1997; Cramp & Simmons, 1983). When playing-back a species-specific song from a mobile CD-player, the observed individual frequently attacked the source of the sound, and replied to it by singing short songs consisting of 3-4 syllables during the attacking flights.

The genus *Cisticola* contains fifty-one, mainly African species (Monroe *et al.*, 1997). Only four species breed in the Palearctic, with the Zitting Cisticola as the only *Cisticola* species breeding in Europe (Baker, 1997). The breeding range of this species covers a huge but patchy area spanning

from Southern Europe southwards to South Africa and eastwards to South Asia. The Zitting Cisticola inhabits tall grassland habitats, generally located close to marshy areas.

Due to its large range and large overall population size, the Zitting Cisticola is regarded as 'Lower risk/least concern' by the IUCN (Baillie *et al.*, 2004). Although there have not been specific investigations, there is evidence of population increase in the Mediterranean region and expansion of its breeding range, and also short term fluctuations and population declines are reported (Jiquet & Julliard, 2007), which are usually influenced by hard winters.

The Zitting Cisticola is a rare vagrant to North and Central Europe, and has been recorded in countries far away from the breeding areas, e.g. in Denmark (Klein *et al.*, 2003), Sweden (Mortensen & Pedersen, 2002), United Kingdom (Sharrock, 1972) and Belgium (Herroelen, 2000). Individuals of this species observed outside the breeding range are usually regarded as spring overshoot. Even the specimen recorded at Lake Kolon can be regarded as an overshoot, but it is worth mentioning that due to the global climate change, it is possible that Zitting Cisticola will sooner or later be a regular visitor to, or even a breeding species in Hungary.

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Figure 1. Zitting Cisticola (*Cisticola juncidis*) at Lake Kolon, Hungary. (Photo János Oláh)