



Unprecedented influx of Yellow-browed Warblers (*Phylloscopus inornatus*) in Spain during autumn 2014

Entrada sin precedentes de mosquiteros bilistados (Phylloscopus inornatus) en España durante el otoño de 2014

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Abstract

A unprecedented influx of Yellow-browed Warblers has been recorded during autumn 2014 in Spain. A total of 145 different birds were observed, from early October until mid December. A first 'wave' was detected during October (1st to 25th) in the northeast (Catalonia and Balearic Islands). A second movement detected around the northern half from mid October, with an increase in the south and Canary Islands suggesting a shift. A third influx began during early November, detected in the north as well as in the south as probably a new shift from the previous. Finally, a short final influx was detected in the northwest by end of November.

Resumen

Un influjo sin precedentes de mosquiteros bilistados fue registrado en España en el otoño de 2014. En total 145 aves fueron observadas, desde comienzos de octubre hasta mediados de diciembre. Se han identificado hasta cuatro diferentes entradas: la primera entre el 1 y 25 de octubre en Cataluña e Islas Baleares; una segunda entrada que empezaría por la mitad norte a mediados de octubre pero que posteriormente se desplazaría hacia el sur e islas Canarias; una tercera en el norte a comienzos de noviembre que a continuación se extendería hacia el sur y, finalmente, una cuarta entrada, que se originaría en el noroeste a finales de noviembre.

Introduction

The Yellow-browed Warbler (*Phylloscopus inornatus*) is an Old World passerine, breeding from the European Urals east to the Okhotsk sea in eastern Siberia, and wintering in south and southeastern Asia from Iran to Indonesia (Clement 2006). Vagrancy due reverse migration (Rabøl 1969, Vinicombe & Cottridge 1996) and/or exploratory migration (*Zwischenzug*) westwards with eventual travel back to Asia (de Juana 2008) is often recorded in Europe elsewhere, being the most frequent vagrant Phylloscopidae. Most European records (apart from those from the Urals) are obtained in September-November, with a neat peak by mid/late September in the northeast (Ullman 1989, Folvik 1992, Paal 2011), late September and early October in the United Kingdom (Vinicombe & Cottridge 1996; Fraser 2013, White & Kehoe 2014), mid October in France and northern Spain (de Juana 2008,

Barnagaud & Issa 2011) and by late October in southern Spain (de Juana 2008). It is unknown whether the numbers of Yellow-browed Warblers recorded in winter in the Canary Islands in the last years are an eventual phenomenon or whether it is the onset of a new or previously ignored migratory/wintering pattern for this species, that would explain the spring records in mainland Europe (Gilroy & Lees 2003, de Juana 2008, García Vargas & Sagardía 2014).

In northern and western European countries this species is no longer considered a rarity by the national rarities committees [e.g. United Kingdom (since 1963), Sweden (since 1982) and France (since 2006)], and in other countries (e.g. Switzerland) the increasing number of records in the last years will probably deserve a 'regular migrant' status (van den Berg & Bosman 1999, Reeber *et al.* 2008, SOF 2011, BBRC 2014, CAVS 2014, DutchBirding & CDNA



2014). The annual numbers of Yellow-browed Warblers in countries such as United Kingdom and France are variable (Barnagaud & Issa 2011, Fraser 2013, White & Kehoe 2014).

In this note we describe the notable influx detected during 2014 in Spain, discussing it in the present context of knowledge about the species. To compile the records we have used the two main websites which publish rarity records in Spain & Portugal: Reservoir Birds (www.reservoirbirds.com) and Rare Birds in Spain (www.rarebirdspain.net/home.htm).

Status in Spain

This species was formerly considered a rare, irregular vagrant in Spain: first and second Spanish records were obtained as late as 1967 and the third only in 1985 (de Juana 2006). Moreover, just 42 individuals were accepted by the Spanish rarities committee up to (and including) 2003 (de Juana & CR/SEO 2005); for the same period, 829 records were assessed in France and 9093 in Britain (de Juana 2008). However, the increasing number of birders with a good knowledge of the diagnostic callings of this species and the active network of bird ringers rised up the number of Yellow-browed Warblers in Spain up to 118 to 2011 (Gutiérrez *et al.* 2013). Although a total of 94 records were obtained in 2012 (18 birds, all in October-December, plus two overwintering birds in the Canary Islands since autumn 2011), 64 birds during 2013 (with 58 in October-December, including 23 birds in the Canary Islands; García Vargas & Sagardía 2014) and early 2014 (12 new birds, all of them but one in the Canaries), the unprecedented influx from early October to mid December of 2014 set up a new record year for the species in Spain.

The 2014 influx

After recording 114 birds in Finland in September (Fennoscandian Birds 2014) and 75 in the Netherlands in that month (Waarneming.nl 2014), the very first Yellow-browed Warbler of the autumn was recorded in Valencia on the 2nd October (Dies & Garcia

2014). The following days added more new birds to the Spanish rarity alerts, and as soon as the 24th, 32 different birds were recorded. By that time, three birds were seen in Portugal (19th-21th). However, this was only the beginning: from 26th October to 13th November, a stunning total of 88 new birds was seen in Spain, being 31st October and 1st November the peak days, both with 11 new birds. New birds were seen in a slower pace by the next month (Figures 1-2).

In total, from 2nd October 2014 up to and including 14th December 2014 there were 116 records involving 145 different birds. The mean staying was $2,7 \pm 4,8$ days (range: 1-31 days).

In an Iberian context, 5 birds in Portugal and at least 6 in Gibraltar should be added.

Four probable arrivals or 'entries' of new birds were identified: the first 'wave', from 1st- 15th October, was slightly biased to the northeast (Catalonia and the Balearic Islands), and continued by the 16th-25th October roughly in the same area. The second arrival, from 16th-25th October, began across the northern half of Spain, with an increase of records by the 26th-31st October in the southern half and in the Canary Islands, suggesting a southward shift. In this period, a third arrival started simultaneously in the northern half. By early November (1st-5th), there was a great increase of observations in the northern half (suggesting an ongoing third arrival) and in the Canary Islands (end of second 'entry'). The third wave went south slowly by the 6th-10th November, and 'vanished' by the following days (11th-25th), with few records further south. A fourth arrival was detected only in Galicia (northwest) by the 26th-30th November, with scattered records onwards (Figures 3-7).

'Entries' by the northwest and north of Spain match with a southwards, Atlantic 'flyway' of this species, already suggested for France, that matches with the overall pattern in Europe (Barnagaud & Issa 2011). The 'entries' through northeastern Spain and Balearics are probably related to another migration path, perhaps through the Rhône river valley and then



following the French Mediterranean coastline southwards, converging in the easternmost Pyrenees (“Mediterranean corridor” for migrating birds, including passerines) (Galarza & Tellería 2003, Barnagaud & Issa 2011).

All the 17 Spanish autonomous communities but three (Cantabria, La Rioja and Madrid) hosted at least one Yellow-browed Warbler. Even the tiny autonomous city of Ceuta (located in N Africa) had its record this autumn! 29 out of 50 provinces produced at least one record of this species, being Las Palmas (the Canary Islands, most of the records in Lanzarote and Fuerteventura islands) the province with the highest count (17 records related to 35 birds), followed by Barcelona (Catalonia; 14 records of single birds) and the Galician province of A Coruña (11 records, 16 birds). In these provinces, high density of birders and/or specific surveys to detect this species probably explains this amount of data. Just 21 out of the 145 birds recorded (14,5%) were detected by ringing; remarkably, up to (and including) 2003, 47.6% of records of Yellow-browed Warblers in Spain were those provided by ringers (de Juana 2006). Knowledge of the call seemed critical for this increase in the numbers of birds detected without ringing in 2014. Moreover, two birds were found dead during this influx (Granada and Cádiz).

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Figure 1. A Yellow-browed Warbler *Phylloscopus inornatus* recorded during this 'influx'. 7th November 2014, A Coruña city (Fernando Pereiras).

Figura 1. Un mosquitero bilistado *Phylloscopus inornatus* registrado durante el presente influjo. 7 de noviembre de 2014, ciudad de A Coruña (Fernando Pereiras).

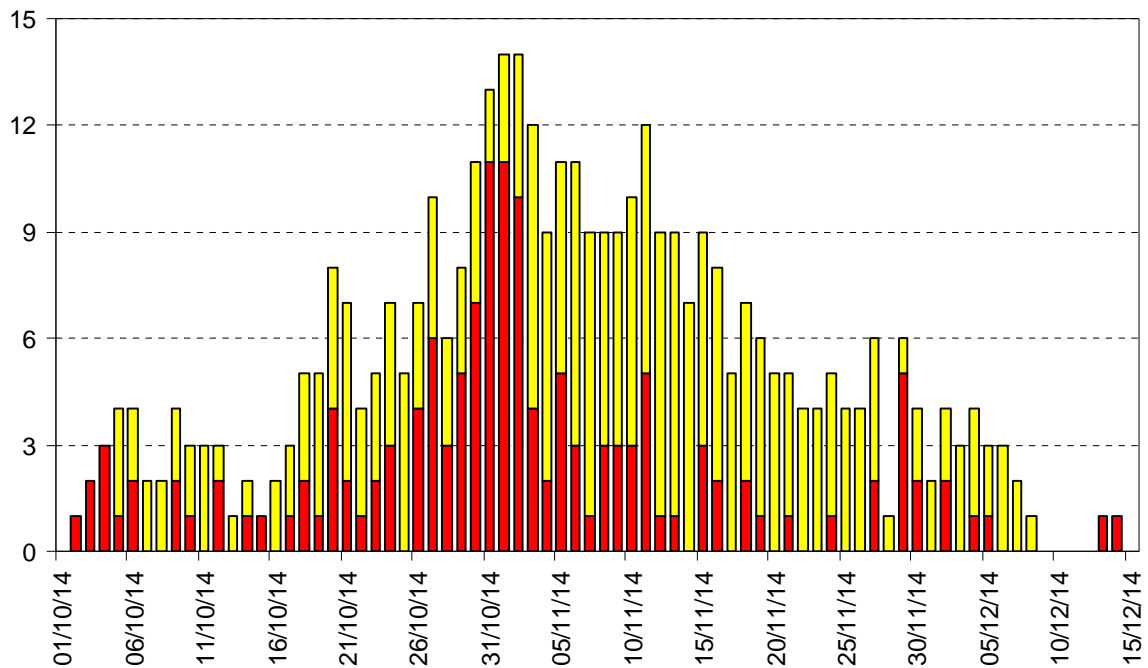


Figure 2. Records of Yellow-browed Warbler in Spain in the period 1st October-15th December 2014. Red bars: new birds. Yellow bars: birds previously mentioned.

Figura 2. Registros de mosquitero bilistado en España en el período 1 de octubre-15 de diciembre de 2014. Barras rojas: nuevas aves. Barras amarillas: aves mencionadas previamente.

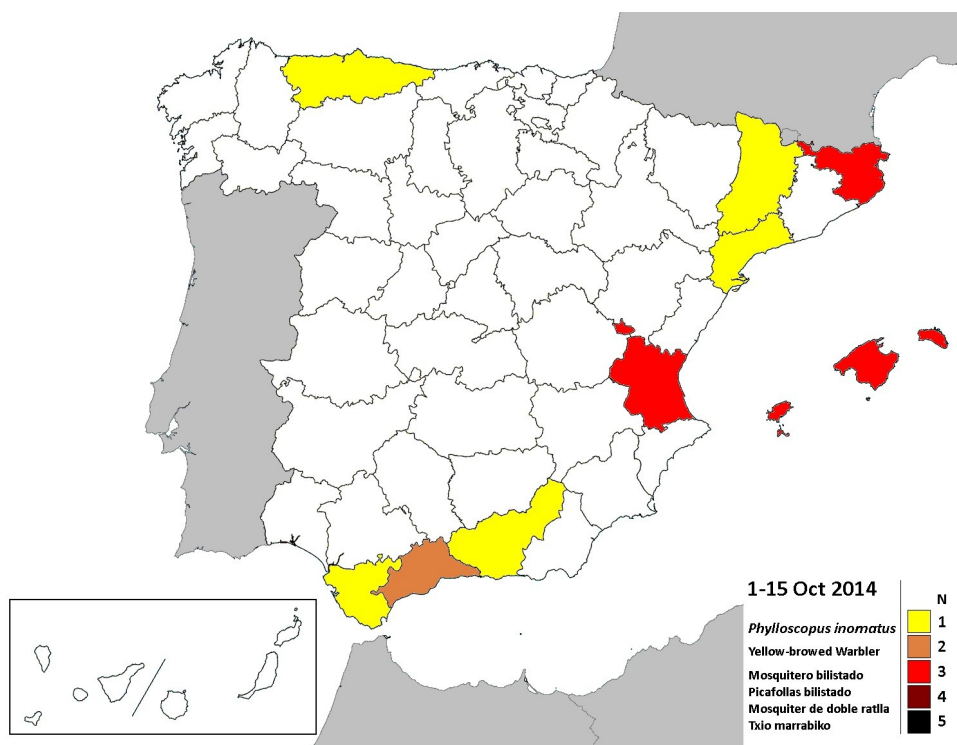


Figure 3. Distribution by provinces of the Yellow-browed Warblers recorded in Spain in the period 1st - 15th October 2014 (only new birds; n=16).

Figura 3. Distribución provincial de los mosquiteros bilistados registrados en España en el período del 1 al 15 de octubre de 2014 (sólo aves nuevas; n=16).

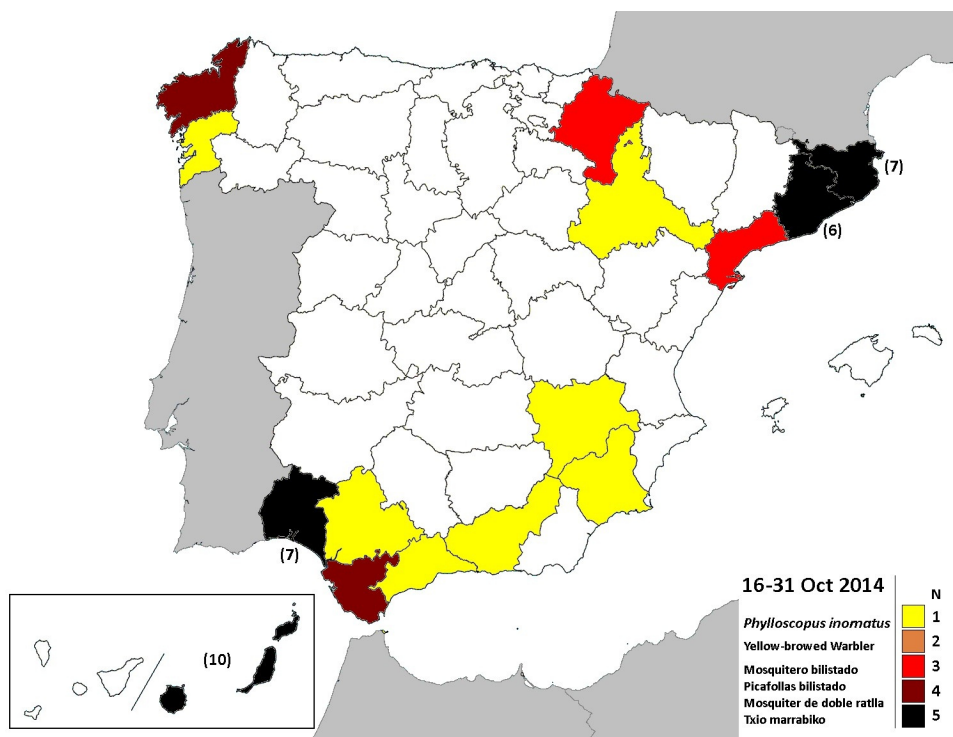


Figure 4. Distribution by provinces of the Yellow-browed Warblers recorded in Spain in the period 16th - 31st October 2014 (only new birds; n=52).

Figura 4. Distribución provincial de los mosquiteros bilistados registrados en España en el período del 16 al 31 de octubre de 2014 (sólo aves nuevas; n=52).

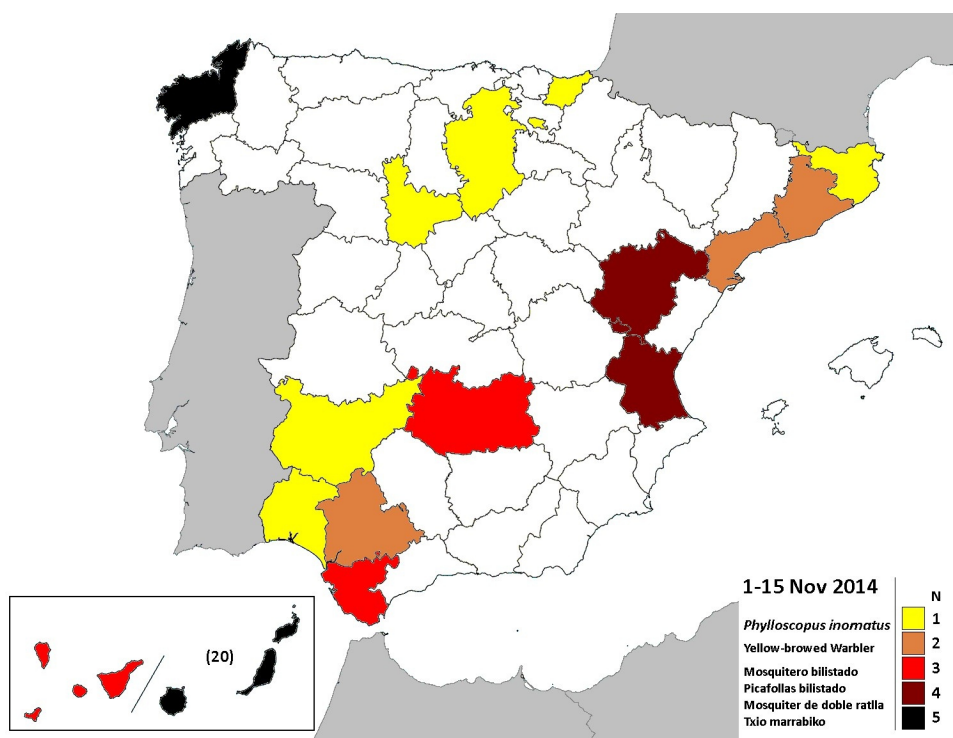


Figure 5. Distribution by provinces of the Yellow-browed Warblers recorded in Spain in the period 1st - 15th November 2014 (only new birds; n=54).

Figura 5. Distribución provincial de los mosquiteros bilistados registrados en España en el período del 1 al 15 de noviembre de 2014 (sólo aves nuevas; n=54).

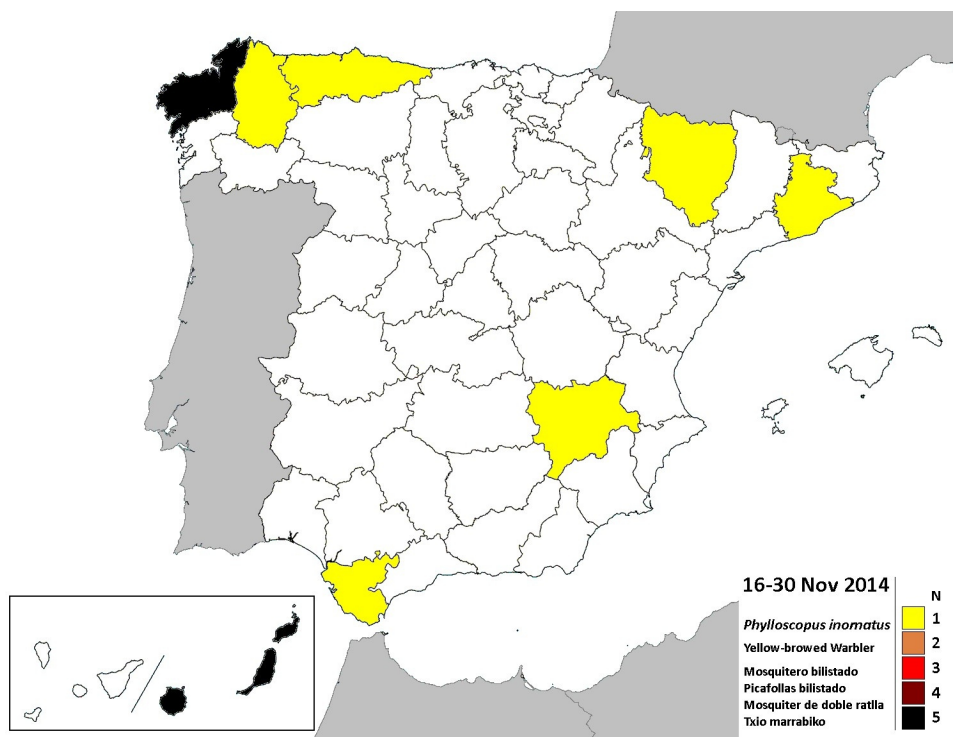


Figure 6. Distribution by provinces of the Yellow-browed Warblers recorded in Spain in the period 16th - 30th November 2014 (only new birds; n=16).

Figura 6. Distribución provincial de los mosquiteros bilistados registrados en España en el período del 16 al 30 de noviembre de 2014 (sólo aves nuevas; n=16).

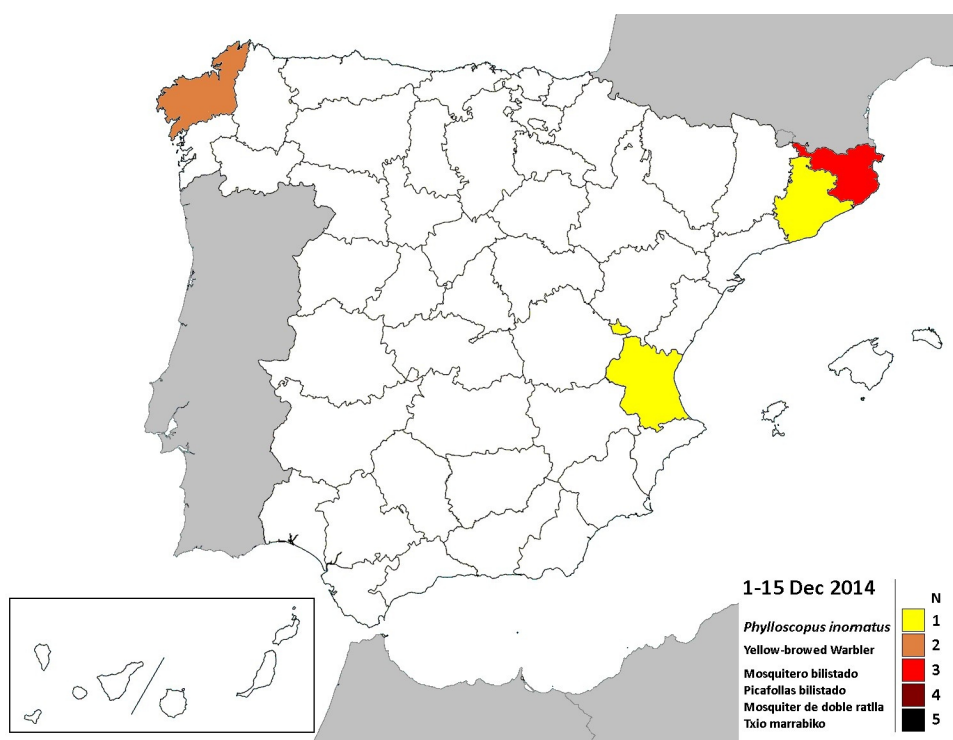


Figure 7. Distribution by provinces of the Yellow-browed Warblers recorded in Spain in the period 1st - 15th December 2014 (only new birds; n=7).

Figura 7. Distribución provincial de los mosquiteros bilistados registrados en España en el período del 1 al 15 de diciembre de 2014 (sólo aves nuevas; n=7).