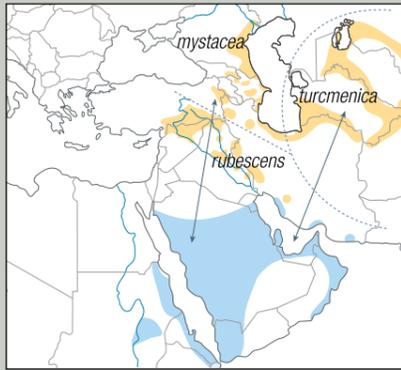


MÉNÉTRIES'S WARBLER

Sylvia mystacea Ménétries, 1832

Fr. – Fauvette de Ménétries
Ger. – Tamariskengrasmücke
Sp. – Curruca de Ménétries
Swe. – Östlig sammetshätt

Birders familiar with old field guide images of a pink-flushed, black-headed and rather striking *Sylvia* must frequently have been disappointed by their first experience of this species, as the form most likely to be encountered by W European birders, *rubescens*, is not so dark-headed and has very little pink on the underparts, even in spring plumage.



S. m. rubescens, ad ♂, Turkey, May: race based on locality, but note pale pinkish cast to whitish underparts (here at extreme end of spectrum and further enhanced by puffed-out throat). This bird has rather restricted pinkish base to lower mandible, but ill-defined greyish outer webs to tertials are typical. Aged by being not heavily worn, with bluish-grey fringes to ad primary-coverts and remiges, and deeper/purer red-brown iris. (D. Occhiato)

IDENTIFICATION A medium-sized *Sylvia* with broadly similar plumage to Sardinian Warbler. ♂ has blackish fore-crown, lores and ear-coverts, becoming progressively paler (more dark grey than blackish) on rear crown, merging with medium grey rest of upperparts. Almost blackish uppertail, which when fanned shows extensive white outer corners and edges. Darkish wings with broad, ill-defined tertial edgings. Underparts have very pale pinkish cast, mainly on lower throat and upper breast (though amount of pink varies, being more saturated in northern and eastern races, in which whitish submoustachial stripe is better developed). Eye-ring usually pinkish-buff or whitish, and orange-brown iris and reddish orbital ring quite pronounced. ♀ nondescript, sandy-grey above, including head (which can be dark grey in older ♀♀), with whitish lores. Eye-ring whitish or has some pale pinkish-buff feathers (orbital ring compared to ♂ paler, and iris often duller). Tertials diffusely patterned, and underparts white, partly tinged pale buff, mainly on body-sides, while very dark uppertail is most striking character. Rather broad bill with pale pinkish-horn base to lower mandible. Legs dull orange-brown. Behaviour and habits much like Sardinian Warbler, but raises, waves and often fans tail. Has chattering or rattling calls, like Rüppell's Warbler or miniature Barred Warbler (though compared to latter has nasal tone and is feebler, higher-pitched and subtly faster).



♂ Ménétries's Warbler, *S. m. rubescens* (left: United Arab Emirates, Feb) versus Sardinian Warbler, *S. m. momus* (right: Israel, Dec): these two races are the palest taxa of their species, very similar, and their breeding ranges are not far apart. Remember that although ♂ Ménétries's often shows some (diagnostic) pinkish-red on throat/breast, others virtually lack any, being mostly whitish-grey and similar to Sardinian; also, although ♂ Ménétries's tends to show a more ill-defined blackish crown (as here), some can have an almost Sardinian-like intense black crown, well demarcated from grey upperparts. Therefore, confirm Ménétries's broad, ill-defined greyish tertial fringes (whiter and narrower, contrasting with blackish centres, in Sardinian). Age of Ménétries's unsure; Sardinian is ad with evenly-fresh feathers and deep red-brown iris. (Left: D. Clark; right: L. Kislev)

VOCALISATIONS Song is a melodious, energetic chattering warble usually given from within canopy of low tree or dense cover, but sometimes in short song-flight. Longer, more musical and varied than Sardinian, with quality perhaps most approaching either Western or Eastern Subalpine, but often far richer and perhaps slightly lower-keyed. Frequently includes elements of the rattling call and light whistling notes. – A buzzing, rattling call with slight nasal tone, *trrrrrt* in contact, at times slowing slightly at end, *trrrrrt-t-t*, most recalling alarm of Rüppell's Warbler. A certain variation in details, the call sometimes being shorter or less hurried. Also a tongue-clicking *tsek*, not dissimilar to Western Subalpine Warbler or Lesser Whitethroat. A muffled harsh *chair* when anxious.

SIMILAR SPECIES On breeding grounds unlikely to be confused, as greatest potential confusion risks are any within Subalpine Warbler complex or Sardinian Warbler, but little overlap with these, except on migration with Eastern Subalpine and Sardinian race *momus*. Tail of Ménétries's is constantly raised, vigorously waved sideways and up and down (in Eastern Subalpine movements largely absent and in Sardinian much less free or regular), and all three differ in calls. – From ♀-like Eastern Subalpine: Ménétries's has the tail diagnostically much darker (in Eastern Subalpine browner, almost concolorous with upperparts), with more contrasting white edges and extensive square tips (particularly noticeable when spread or seen from below; Eastern Subalpine has narrow white wedge on p5, if any), and Ménétries's also lacks sharply defined and narrow pale fringes to the dark-centred tertials (of Eastern Subalpine), although differences may be obscured by wear and moult. Ménétries's has a rather broad-based bill with the pale area on the lower mandible horn-pink (mainly straw or horn with limited pinkish tinge in Eastern Subalpine). – The palest race of Ménétries's, *rubescens*, and the Levant race, *momus*, of Sardinian Warbler are separable, as Ménétries's usually has an ill-defined dark grey rear crown, whereas nearly all ♂ Sardinian have the dark crown more intensely black and more sharply demarcated from nape. Many Ménétries's have pinkish-red on the throat and breast, but others are whitish-grey and similar to *momus*; however, in close views, Ménétries's almost invariably has broad, ill-defined greyish tertial fringes (whiter and narrower, contrasting with blackish centres, in Sardinian). Most Ménétries's have whitish-sandy or very pale buff flanks (in Sardinian, body-sides more intensely grey, enhancing white throat). Ménétries's usually has a broader bill-base, which is typically pinkish-brown, whereas in Sardinian the bill is slenderer and the pale area



♂, presumed 1stS, ssp. unknown, United Arab Emirates, Feb: safe separation from Sardinian Warbler relies on pinkish cast to underparts, broad, ill-defined tertial edges and pale area on lower mandible being pinkish horn-coloured. Following pre-nuptial moult both ad and 1stY show moult limits in wing (note renewed inner greater coverts and tertials, contrasting with worn primaries and primary-coverts) and ageing often difficult, but strong wear to retained feather tracts in Feb and completely renewed tail better fit 1stY. Some ♂♂ are intermediate in amount of pinkish below and impossible in winter to ascribe to race. (M. Barth)

is almost invariably grey. ♀-like plumages of Ménétries's are separable from ♀ Sardinian based on their (i) paler upperparts, contrasting strongly with the dark uppertail (upperparts browner in Sardinian, contrasting only slightly with tail); (ii) largely white underparts with limited buffish-yellow on sides (extensive warm buff-brown body-sides and contrasting white throat in Sardinian); (iii) much less obvious greyish head in Ménétries's; (iv) grey-brown tertial centres and ill-defined sandy-grey fringes (centres much darker and fringes well defined, narrower and buff-brown to whitish-cream in most Sardinian); (v) more contrasting dark alula (in Sardinian, the similarly dark alula almost matches surrounding tracts). – ♀-like Rüppell's Warbler is larger, more robust and has a proportionately longer, heavier bill, longer primary projection and better-patterned tertials and greater coverts (with well-defined whitish fringes to tertials). – ♀-like Cyprus Warbler is further characterised by the warmer olive-brown body-sides, vent and undertail-coverts (with diagnostic whitish-cream fringes/tips). Ménétries's is also readily separated from both these last-mentioned species by its nervous tail cocking and, in relation to Cyprus, very different call.

AGEING & SEXING Ageing requires a close check of moult and feather wear in wing, and sometimes iris coloration



S. m. mystacea, variation in ♂ plumage (NE Turkey, May): the subspecific/sexual characters of this race include duller grey upperparts, throat/upper breast almost entirely pink, with well-developed whitish submoustachial stripe, and paler pink breast. Nevertheless, although both birds were photographed at same site, note differences in amount of pink below due to individual variation and age differences: the left-hand bird is ad (evenly and less worn with purer orange-brown iris, but note misleading winter renewal of inner greater coverts and tertials), whereas right-hand bird is 1stS (rather strong moult limits in wing, with contrasting juv remiges and primary-coverts, and iris colour). The right-hand bird is paler both above and below, and could not be safely differentiated from *S. m. rubescens* if seen away from breeding grounds. (D. Occhiato)



♂, presumed 1stS, ssp. unknown, United Arab Emirates, Apr: typical tail-cocking posture. Also typical is for young ♂♂ to have very obscure head pattern, and only limited buff-cream or pinkish wash below. However, variation in all races prevents racial labelling. High degree of moult contrast and feather wear in wing, and olive-brown iris best fit a young bird. (H. Roberts)



1stS ♂, ssp. unknown, Kuwait, Mar: typical terrestrial behaviour and raised tail. Ragged rear crown delimitation of blackish cap is often a feature of young ♂♂ at this season. The apparently whitish throat, pale cream-buff flanks and pale grey upperparts best match *S. m. rubescens*, but given substantial individual variation it is impossible to eliminate other taxa. Striking moult limits in wing, with very worn and bleached primary-coverts and remiges, and recently moulted tertials. (M. Pope)



S. m. turcmenica, ♂, possibly ad, Uzbekistan, May: rather similar to *S. m. mystacea* in being extensively saturated pink below, but taxon based on locality. Beware potential confusion with Subalpine Warblers, especially Moltoni's Warbler: note Ménétries's darker grey forehead, more contrastingly dark uppertail (not visible here) and square white tip to r6 (rather than wedge-shaped), and in the field note wavy tail-cocking and voice. Probably ad given brightness of underparts. (G. Baker)