

First Photographic and Video Documentation of the Booted Warbler (*Iduna caligata*) in Egypt Since Its First Record in 1993

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Abstract

The Booted Warbler (*Iduna caligata*) is a small migratory passerine breeding across Central Asia and wintering mainly in the Indian subcontinent. It is regarded as a rare vagrant in the Middle East and North Africa, with very few confirmed records from Egypt. This study presents the **first verified photographic and video documentation** of *I. caligata* in Egypt, recorded on **11 October 2025** at **Wadi El Rayan Protected Area**, Fayoum Governorate. The observation occurred during the World Migratory Bird Day event and involved three independent observers. The bird was photographed and filmed while foraging among shrubs near semi-desert wetlands. Diagnostic morphological features—including pale supercilium, gray-brown upperparts, creamy-white underparts with a rusty-buff tinge, short wings, and square-tipped tail—were clearly visible and confirmed its identification.

This record represents the first verifiable evidence of the species' occurrence in Egypt since its initial unphotographed report in 1993. It underscores the **ecological importance of Egyptian wetlands as stopover habitats** for migratory passerines and highlights the growing role of **collaborative fieldwork and citizen scientists** in regional biodiversity documentation. The finding suggests that the Booted Warbler may occur more regularly in Egypt than previously assumed, emphasizing the need for continuous monitoring and data sharing to enhance understanding of avian migration across the Middle East and North Africa.

Keywords:

Egypt; Fayoum; Wadi El Rayan; Booted Warbler; *Iduna caligata*; *Hippolais caligata*; first photographic record; migration; ornithology; Middle East; new record

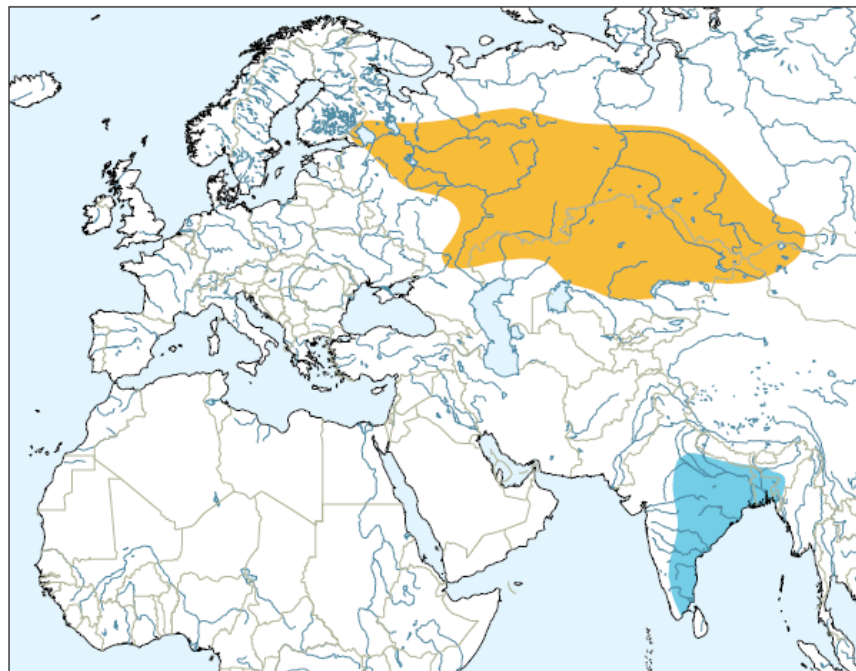
Introduction

The Booted Warbler (*Iduna caligata*) is a small migratory passerine, Length 11.5cm, wing 56–65mm, belonging to the family *Acrocephalidae* (Kennerley and Pearson, 2010, p. 505). It breeds widely across central Asia, extending from eastern Europe to western Mongolia, and winters primarily in the Indian subcontinent. During migration, it occasionally occurs as a vagrant in the Middle East and northeastern Africa. Records of this species outside its normal range are considered rare and hold significant importance for understanding its migratory behavior and range dynamics.

For a long time, the two taxa *Booted* and *Sykes's Warbler* were regarded as a single species under the name *Hippolais caligata* (Booted Warbler sensu lato), with Sykes's Warbler considered merely an eastern subspecies, *H. caligata rama* (Kennerley and Pearson, 2010, p. 503). Molecular (DNA) analysis supported the species-level separation between Booted Warbler (*Iduna caligata*) and Sykes's Warbler (*Iduna rama*). Helbig et al. (2001) conducted a phylogenetic study of the genus *Hippolais* (prior to its reclassification under *Iduna*), revealing clear genetic divergence between *caligata* and *rama* (Helbig et al., 2001, p. 270).

The species' scientific name has also undergone a nomenclatural change: in older references, including Collins's bird guide (Svensson et al., 2009, p. 326), Birds of Britain and Europe (Hume, 2002, p. 445), and **BirdLife's** Taxonomic Checklist 2015 List 8, it appeared as *Hippolais caligata*, but in the 2016 List 9 it was updated to the current name *Iduna caligata*, without any change in its taxonomic status.

Booted Warbler. Breeding range and winter distribution (Kennerley and Pearson, 2010, p. 505)



Booted Warbler. Breeding range and winter distribution.

In the context of Egyptian ornithology, the Booted Warbler has a particularly interesting status. This species was first reported in Egypt in 1993 by **Dr. Sherif Bahaa El-Din** and Ambassador **Ahmed Riad**, two of Egypt's foremost bird experts, with decades of experience in this field. Although the 1993 sighting lacked photographic or physical documentation, it is highly credible due to its scientific standing, objectivity, and accuracy.

Egypt, with its diverse habitats including wetlands, deserts, and agricultural landscapes, serves as an essential migratory corridor linking Eurasia and Africa. The country's wetlands, particularly those in Fayoum and the Wadi El Rayan Protected Area, host a remarkable variety of migratory birds during both spring and autumn movements. Continuous monitoring in these areas contributes not only to the national avian checklist but also to global migratory bird studies.

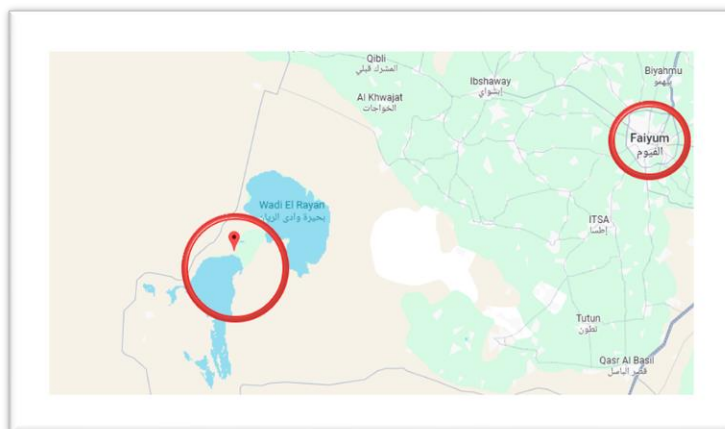
Here, we present the first photographic and video documentation of the Booted Warbler (*Iduna caligata*) in Egypt since its initial report more than three decades ago. This observation provides verifiable evidence of the species' presence within the country and reinforces the ecological value of Egyptian wetlands as stopover habitats for migratory birds. The record also highlights the importance of collaborative fieldwork by independent bird experts and the role of wildlife photographers in improving national biodiversity data.

Methods and Study Area

The observation was conducted during the celebration of World Migratory Bird Day on 11 October 2025, in Wadi El Rayan Protected Area, located in Fayoum Governorate, Egypt. The site lies within one of Egypt's most important wetland systems, consisting of interconnected lakes, sand dunes, and patches of low vegetation that provide feeding and resting habitats for numerous migratory bird species.

The Booted Warbler was encountered by the observers Morhaf Kamal, Mahmoud Elshamy, and Ahmed ElSheikh. The bird was found in bushy area near the semi-desert wetlands near the southern lake of Wadi El Rayan (the waterfall area), perched on low shrubs close to the water edge. The surrounding vegetation mainly comprised some shrubs and small patches of reed and grass, typical of semi-desert wetland environments.

Approximate location of the bird's recording in Egypt: Wadi El Rayan, Fayoum



The observation lasted for approximately 10 minutes, during which the bird was seen feeding actively and occasionally resting. Its behavior was typical of *Iduna* warblers, showing quick movements among shrubs and short flights near the ground. The individual appeared healthy, alert, and not showing signs of fatigue or distress.

Photographic evidence was obtained independently by all three observers, while Ahmed ElSheikh recorded a short video documenting the bird's plumage, posture, and behavior. The photographs and video were later reviewed and compared with reference materials, including regional field guides and online databases such as eBird and the Macaulay Library, and some reliable scientific sources that talk about birds to confirm species identification.

The documentation process followed standard ornithological recording practices, ensuring that the photographs and video clearly display key diagnostic features, including gray brown above, paler below, rusty -buff tinge along the edges of her belly under the wings, with a short dark-tipped bill and conspicuous pale eyebrow. Pot-bellied with short wings and a square-tipped tail.

Results and Discussion

The Booted Warbler (*Iduna caligata*) observed at Wadi El Rayan on 11 October 2025 showed all the key morphological characteristics typical of the species. The bird exhibited gray brown upperparts, a whitish supercilium extending behind the eye, and creamy-white underparts, rusty -buff tinge along the edges of her belly under the wings. The bill appeared slender and slightly darker on the upper mandible, while the legs were brownish-pink with darker toes- booted (*Grimmett et al., 2016, p. 338*). The relatively short primary projection and the overall compact shape were consistent with *Iduna caligata* and clearly distinguished it from the closely related Sykes's

Warbler (*Iduna rama*). The distinctive structure and coloration of the legs were also noted, showing subtle differences from similar *Iduna* species and further supporting the identification.

The high-quality photographs and video footage allowed detailed examination of these features, confirming the identification beyond doubt. The documentation represents the first verifiable record supported by photographic and video evidence for Egypt, thereby filling a long-standing gap since the first unphotographed observation in 1993.

This record has several implications for avian ecology and migration studies in the region. It suggests that *I. caligata* may occur more regularly in Egypt than previously assumed but remains undetected due to its subtle plumage and resemblance to other *Iduna* species. Increased observation effort by birdwatchers and the growing use of high-resolution cameras have significantly improved the likelihood of detecting such rare migrants.

Furthermore, the presence of this species in Wadi El Rayan highlights the ecological importance of Egyptian wetlands as stopover habitats for migratory passerines. The area provides essential resources such as water, vegetation cover, and insect abundance, all of which are vital during migration. Regular monitoring and documentation of bird occurrences in these habitats will contribute greatly to understanding regional migration patterns and updating the Egyptian avifaunal checklist.

This finding also underlines the role of independent bird experts and wildlife photographers in biodiversity documentation. Their contributions are increasingly valuable in regions where formal ornithological surveys are limited. Collaborative fieldwork, combined with digital documentation and open-access data sharing, strengthens the collective scientific understanding of species distribution and migration across the Middle East and North Africa.

Conclusion

This record provides the first confirmed photographic and video evidence of the Booted Warbler (*Iduna caligata*) in Egypt, marking a significant addition to the country's ornithological database. The observation not only confirms the species' presence but also highlights the importance of continuous bird monitoring and proper documentation in Egyptian wetlands.

Given Egypt's strategic location along the migratory routes between Eurasia and Africa, the detection of such rare migrants underscores the need for ongoing

fieldwork and collaboration among professional and independent bird experts. Encouraging participation in wild bird science, together with accessible data-sharing platforms, will further reveal hidden occurrences and enhance our understanding of migration dynamics across the region.

The authors recommend sustained monitoring of Wadi El Rayan Protected Area and similar wetland ecosystems, as they continue to serve as critical stopover habitats for a wide range of migratory bird species, they also recommended providing governmental and non-governmental facilities and assistance that could be very useful to Egypt and the world in this field.

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Booted Warbler photographed by
Mahmoud Elshamy



Booted Warbler photographed by Morhaf Kamal