

Grasshopper Warbler

Locustella naevia

Bird · Summer migrant · Apr–Aug



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A small, streaky brown bird that is far easier to hear than to see. It arrives from Africa in April and settles into the tangled edges of scrub, rough grassland and young plantations, where it all but disappears into the undergrowth. Its mottled brown and olive plumage gives it near-perfect camouflage against dead grass and bramble. Most people who "see" a grasshopper warbler actually just hear one — an extraordinary, mechanical reeling trill, delivered at dawn or dusk from a low perch, and often mistaken for an insect or a fishing reel being cast. The bird itself creeps mouse-like through dense cover rather than flying between perches, so patience and a good ear matter more than sharp eyes here. By August it has usually slipped away south again, leaving only a gap where its strange song used to be.

BEHAVIOUR

It sings its reeling song for minutes at a time, turning its head slowly from side to side so the sound seems to swell and fade as if it's moving. Between songs it forages low down, creeping through grass and bramble stems hunting insects and spiders rather than flying between perches. Nests are built close to the ground, hidden deep in tussocks or brambles, safe from all but the most determined predator.

WHEN TO SEE IT

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QUICK FACTS

FAMILY	Grass warblers (Locustellidae)
SIZE	12–13 cm · smaller than a sparrow
UK STATUS	Red-listed

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