

BIRDS IN OUR AREA - ... Text & drawings by Kaye Traynor

LITTLE GRASSBIRD AND GOLDEN-HEADED CISTICOLA

Members of the Family of Old-world Warblers, they are small, brownish, grass and reed-dwelling, strong-voiced birds.

Little Grassbird *Megalurus gramineus*

Also called: Little Marshbird, Little Reedbird, Marsh Warbler

These birds are more often heard than seen. They are identified mostly by their melancholy call note during the breeding season.

The Little Grassbird is a small, unobtrusive, dark-grey bird, 140 mm in length, including the 60 mm tail. Its head is grey-brown, with a pale eyebrow, chin and throat; the crown and cheeks are streaked dark grey. The upper body is brown-grey, with streaks of dark grey; the dark wing feathers are edged with white, and the paler, grey underbody is also streaked. Young birds are a more uniform grey with finer streaking.

Breeding season is mostly between August and January. They make a deep cup nest of grasses and swamp plants, sometimes lined with feathers. They lay three to five eggs, 19 x 14 mm in size, which are white or pink-tinged, speckled with purple-red.

Little Grassbirds are shy, preferring thick reed beds where they can hide from intruders, and they also can be found in temporary wetlands after rains. They feed on insects and other small arthropods, usually remaining in the dense cover of grasses and swamp vegetation.

Golden-headed Cisticola *Cisticola exilis*

Also called: Golden Cisticola, Tailorbird, Gold-capped Grass Warbler, Cornbird



Golden-headed Cisticola

In breeding season, the male Golden-headed Cisticola has a golden-orange head, which is crested when calling, and a paler chin and throat. The tail is black, with paler tips, and is shorter during breeding season. Females are similar to non-breeding males.

The Golden-headed Cisticola lives in sub-coastal areas, wetlands, swamp margins, wet grasslands and rivers, and irrigated farmland. It prefers tangled vegetation close to the ground, but breeding males are often seen singing from tall grasses or other shrubs.

They feed on insects taken from the ground amongst the tall grasses.

Breeding season is from September to March. They build a rounded nest with a side entrance near the top, from fine grasses, plant-down and spiders' web. Leaves are usually stitched to the outer surface, and the nest is lined with soft plant-down. Both male and females help in nest-building. Three to four eggs are laid, which are bright blue, blotched with red-brown or purple, and 16 x 12 mm in size.



Little Grassbird

References: Birdlife Australia *Birds in Backyards*, Reader's Digest *Complete Book of Australian Birds*

- a. Birdlife Australia *Birds in Backyards* www.birdsinbackyards.net/about/BirdLife-Australia
- b. Schodde, R., and S. C. Tideman (Series Editor) 1990, *Reader's Digest Complete Book of Australian Birds* 2nd edn, Reader's Digest {(Australia)} Pty Ltd, Sydney.

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