

# First record of Tristram's Bunting *Emberiza tristrami* from India

Rohit Naniwadekar, Ashwin Viswanathan,  
Raman Kumar & Shashank Dalvi



145, 146. Photograph of the Tristram's Bunting taken on 18.xii.2011 near Bom Nala in Namdapha Tiger Reserve. Photograph was taken with a Canon Powershot handheld camera.

Naniwadekar, R., Viswanathan, A., Kumar, R., & Dalvi, S., 2013. First record of Tristram's Bunting *Emberiza tristrami* from India. *Indian BIRDS* 8 (5): 134–135. Rohit Naniwadekar, Nature Conservation Foundation, 3076/5, IV Cross, Gokulam Park, Mysore 570002, Karnataka, India. Email: [rohit@ncf-india.org](mailto:rohit@ncf-india.org) [Corresponding author] [RN]

Ashwin Viswanathan, Centre for Ecological Sciences, Indian Institute of Science, Bangalore 560002, Karnataka & WCS India Program, National Centre for Biological Sciences, GKVK, Bangalore 560065, Karnataka. Email: [ashwinv2005@gmail.com](mailto:ashwinv2005@gmail.com) [AV]

Raman Kumar, Nature Science Initiative, 36 Curzon Road, Dehradun 248001, Uttarakhand. Email: [raman@naturescienceinitiative.org](mailto:raman@naturescienceinitiative.org) [RK]

Shashank Dalvi, Centre for Wildlife Studies, 224 Garden Apartments, Bangalore 560001, Karnataka, India & WCS India Program, National Centre for Biological Sciences, GKVK, Bangalore 560065, Karnataka. Email: [shashank.da@gmail.com](mailto:shashank.da@gmail.com) [SK]

**N**amdapha Tiger Reserve, in eastern Arunachal Pradesh, is known to be one of the most avifaunally diverse sites in the world, and along with Kamlang Wildlife Sanctuary to its north, has been listed as an Important Bird Area (Islam & Rahmani 2004). A recent avian survey by Srinivasan *et al.* (2010) resulted in 62 new records for the area including globally threatened species such as the Black-necked Crane *Grus nigricollis* and Blyth's Tragopan *Tragopan blythii*.

During a recently concluded study on hornbills [Bucerotidae] in Namdapha, we (RN, RK, and AV) sighted a bunting [Emberizidae] at 1130 hrs on 18 December 2011 on the way to Ranijheel Plateau, before Bom Nala (27°32'N, 96°28'E). On sighting the bird, we took some photographs of the bunting. It had a broad, pale supercilium that did not appear two-coloured. The supercilium had a prominent black border on the upper side and on the lower side behind the eye. The lower black border curved downwards and joined the prominent pale moustachial stripe. The moustachial stripe and the supercilium were similar colored. This bunting seemed to lack a prominent crest. We could catch a glimpse of its small crest on only one occasion. This gave the head of the bird a pointy profile. The back of the bunting was heavily streaked. We did not get a clear view of its under parts as the bird mostly showed its back to us. The sides of the belly were not as heavily streaked as the back and were more buff than white in colour.

We saw a single individual on the trekking path [145, 146] that was c. 1.5 m wide, in the middle of evergreen forest at an elevation of c. 800 m asl. The forest is classified as sub-tropical broad-leaved evergreen forest (Datta *et al.* 2008). The understorey is dominated by bushes of the *Elatostema* species, the common understorey trees being *Baccaurea ramiflora* and *Saprosma ternatum*. The middle storey is dominated by *Castanopsis*, *Beilschmiedia assamica*, *Dysoxylum*, and *Cinnamomum*, while *Altingia excelsa*, *Schima wallichii*, *Terminalia myriocarpa*, and *Shorea assamica* dominate the canopy layer in the area.

The bird remained on the trekking path while we observed it for c. 3–4 min. It was bold but it kept flying and settling on the ground ahead of us, when we tried to approach it. At one point we lost the bird, only to find it later behind us again on the trekking path. We did not see the bird later during our stay there.

The bird appeared similar to the Rustic Bunting *Emberiza rustica* that is described as hypothetical to the region by

Rasmussen & Anderton (2005). However, 'our' bird can be distinguished from that based on its supercilium that reaches up to the bill and the more prominent black borders above and below the supercilium. We also failed to notice any broad chestnut streaking on its flanks that are present in a Rustic Bunting (Rasmussen & Anderton 2005). With Rustic Bunting being ruled out, we narrowed down the identity to either Tristram's- *Emberiza tristrami* or Yellow-browed- *E. chrysophrys* Bunting. The Yellow-browed Bunting can be distinguished from Tristram's based on the lack of extensive streaking on its flanks and a bi-coloured supercilium (unicoloured in this bird as seen in field and in pictures). In addition, this individual was seen in the middle of evergreen forest as against open country in which the Yellow-browed Bunting is seen (Paul Leader, *pers. comm.*). Hence, by considering all the above evidence we concluded that the bird in question was a Tristram's Bunting.

Tristram's Bunting is currently reported to breed in south-eastern Siberia, Ussuriland, north-eastern China, and North Korea. It winters in southern China. However, it is a rare winter visitor to northern Myanmar, northern Laos, and western and eastern Tonkin (Robson 2000). This bird has been reported from the Pyepat Ridge (25°51'N, 96°48'E) in northern Myanmar, which is approximately 180 km (straight line distance) to the south of Namdapha Tiger Reserve (Pamela Rasmussen, *pers. comm.*).

Additional surveys are required to ascertain whether this sighting was just a one-off vagrant record, or whether eastern Arunachal Pradesh features in the wintering range of this bird. Given the recent spate of new records from Arunachal Pradesh it is important that comprehensive surveys are carried out across the different hill ranges in the state, across several seasons and years, to completely document the avian diversity of the area.

## Acknowledgements

We thank Praveen J., who first indicated that this bird could be Tristram's Bunting. We are grateful to Per Alström, Paul J. Leader, and Jesper Hornskov, who helped ascertain the identity of this species, Pamela Rasmussen and Paul R Sweet for providing location of the Tristram's Bunting from Myanmar. We thank the Arunachal Pradesh Forest Department for giving us permits to conduct avian research in Namdapha Tiger Reserve. Special thanks to Aparajita Datta for her support and encouragement. The hornbill research was funded by Rufford Small Grants, U.K., and International Foundation for Science, Sweden.

## references

- Datta, A., Anand, M. O., & Naniwadekar, R., 2008. Empty forests: Large carnivore and prey abundance in Namdapha National Park, north-east India. *Biological Conservation* 141: 1429–1435.
- Islam, Z.-u., & Rahmani, A. R., 2004. *Important Bird Areas in India. Priority sites for conservation*. 1st ed. Mumbai: Indian Bird Conservation Network: Bombay Natural History Society and BirdLife International (UK). Pp. i–xviii, 1–1133.
- Rasmussen, P. C., & Anderton, J. C., 2005. *Birds of South Asia: the Ripley guide*. 1st ed. Washington, D.C. and Barcelona: Smithsonian Institution and Lynx Edicions. 2 vols. Pp. 1–378; 1–683.
- Robson, C., 2005. *Birds of southeast Asia*. New Holland, London: Princeton University Press. Pp. 1–304.
- Srinivasan, U., Dalvi, S., Naniwadekar, R., Anand, M. O., & Datta, A., 2010. The birds of Namdapha National Park and surrounding areas: recent significant records and a checklist of the species. *Forktail* 26 (August): 92–116.

# First record of Short-tailed Shearwater *Puffinus tenuirostris* from Bangladesh

Paul M. Thompson, C. M. Reza & Enam Ul Haque

Thompson, P. M., Reza, C. M., & Ul Haque, E., 2013. First record of Short-tailed Shearwater *Puffinus tenuirostris* from Bangladesh. *Indian BIRDS* 8 (5): 135–136.

Paul M. Thompson, House 32 Road 10, Banani, Dhaka, Bangladesh. Email: [paul@agni.com](mailto:paul@agni.com)

Enam Ul Haque, Apartment # 4B House # 11 (Primrose), Road # 4, Banani DOHS, Kakoli, Dhaka 1206, Bangladesh, Email: [enamuh@gmail.com](mailto:enamuh@gmail.com)

Short-tailed Shearwater *Puffinus tenuirostris* is an abundant, medium-sized, seabird that nests in southern and eastern Australia and spends the non-breeding season (northern summer) in the northern Pacific Ocean (Carboneras 1992). Its appearance is more or less uniformly dark brown, long winged, with a rounded head, slender dark bill, and greyish feet extending in flight beyond a short rounded tail (Grimmett *et al.* 1999). There are no previous records of the species from Bangladesh (Rasmussen & Anderton 2005; Siddiqui *et al.* 2008; Grimmett *et al.* 2011).

This note describes the first sighting of Short-tailed Shearwater for Bangladesh: a captured bird photographed at St. Martin's Island (20°34'–20°39'N, 92°18'–92°21'E). This is the only sedimentary coralline island of Bangladesh, with coral formations, and is located in the north-eastern part of the Bay of Bengal, c. 9 km south of the Cox's Bazar–Teknaf Peninsula tip, and c. 8 km west of the north-western coast of Myanmar at the mouth of the Naf River (Thompson & Islam 2009).

On 19 April 2008, while taking a walk with his family along the beach of St. Martin's Island (the most south-easterly point of Bangladesh) CMR saw a fisherman carrying an unfamiliar bird hanging from a wire suspended from his hand. CMR photographed the bird and asked the fisherman where he got it. The latter replied that while he was out fishing that day (within approximately one kilometre of the island) he had hit the bird with a pole and captured it when it landed on his boat. He also

said that many such birds were flying over the boat at the time. Since he did not distinguish it from terns and gulls, it is uncertain if more than one shearwater was actually present in the flock of birds he saw. The fisherman was carrying it home to eat for dinner, and after Reza took five photographs, continued on his way and the bird was presumably consumed.

Later Reza showed the photographs to Samiul Mohsanin, who referred them to EUH, who contacted PMT. While EUH and PMT were sure it was a shearwater species, both lacked adequate field experience of potentially confusing species. PMT therefore circulated photographs to a range of experienced birders and obtained their views. The photographs originally circulated had unbeknown to PMT been “photoshopped” with the wire edited out, leading to speculation about the photographs' provenance, given the unnatural position of the bird. EUH subsequently obtained the original photographs showing the wire, and the story of how they were obtained. Fortunately, two of the photographs taken at close range show clearly the head of the shearwater [147, 148], while [149] shows the fisherman and context of the record.

The key comments and advice on identification given by experts consulted are summarised here. Killian Mullarney commented, “It is a shearwater and, on first glance, I would guess a Short-tailed.” David James, Mike Carter, and Jeff Davies, all from Australia with extensive experience of the species and potential confusion species in their normal range, clarified the key features



147. Short-tailed Shearwater from Bangladesh: side view showing legs, tail length, and rounded head.



148. Short-tailed Shearwater: front view showing bill and nostrils.