

# Unusual nest of Crested Bunting *Melophus lathami* at Suhagpura, Pratapgarh district, Rajasthan, India

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The Crested Bunting *Melophus lathami* is a common resident of the Indian Subcontinent, but is rather local and capricious (Ali & Ripley 1999). Within Indian boundaries it is found from eastern Rajasthan and Gir forest, south-western Maharashtra, northern Andhra Pradesh, eastern Madhya Pradesh, southern Bihar through Sikkim, Meghalaya, Cachar, Manipur and Sikkim (Byers *et al.* 1995).

It breeds between April and August, commencing with the local wet season. The nest is either placed on the ground, under a rock or a bush, in a crevice, under roots or steep banks, walls and precipitous slopes, in a hollow in a bank or loosely built stone-wall, between the stones forming the embankment between narrow terraced fields (Roberts 1992; Byers *et al.* 1995; Ali & Ripley 1999).

We are not aware of any recent nesting records of the species from Rajasthan except very old nesting records of Capt. E. A. Butler (1875). On Mount Abu, Sirohi district, Butler found it breeding in June and July. He found nests, “generally

placed in a hole on the side of a bank, or at the foot of a rock under cover of a tuft of grass or ferns.”

HSS found four active nests in Jhalana forest, adjoining Jaipur, between 1999 and 2005. One nest was in a crevice of a crumbling stone wall. The remaining three nests were on quite steep sand banks of an ephemeral nullah in the forest and concealed under tufts of grass.

An active nest was found on 9th August 2008 by DM barely c. 1.60 m away from the Pratapgarh–Chittor road near Dhamotar (24°08N, 74°43' E) in Pratapgarh district (Fig. 1). The nest was on the ground just at the base of a stunted coppice growth of babul *Acacia nilotica*. The cup-shaped nest measured 65 mm in diameter and was made of rootlets and fine grass. He observed the female feeding the chick. When we examined the nest on 10th August 2008, the chick had fledged. There was one egg left in the nest but no parents could be seen.

The nests of Crested Bunting in Jaipur and Pratapgarh match the description in published literature (see above). However, GSB and DM found one nest in an unusual location on 17th September 2007 near Suhagpura village (23°53'N, 74°42'E) on Pratapgarh–Banswara road (Fig. 2). Noticing a female Crested Bunting carrying a caterpillar in its beak and entering into a lantana *Lantana camara* bush, they searched for the nest—and found it the well concealed, c. 2.75 m away from the busy road. The cup-shaped nest was c. 80 cm above the ground in the upper portion of the exotic bush and comprised rootlets, fine grasses and twigs of herbaceous plants. The three chicks in the nest were in down. Unlike other locations described above the area around Suhagpura was devoid of any trees, the only vegetation being scattered bushes of *Lantana camara* along the road. The undulating landscape was essentially grassland with few small patches of agricultural fields.

Although the site for the nest varies considerably in this species, a nest in a bush is extremely rare. A. O. Hume thus summed up his own experiences: “The nest is place in holes in banks or walls, on the ground under some overhanging clod or rock, or concealed in some thick tuft of grass and, very exceptionally (I have only seen one such), in a low thick bush within a few inches of the ground” (Baker 1934).

## Dedication

This note is dedicated to our friend, Thakur Digvijay Singh of Dhamotar (1939–2008). Besides his encyclopedic knowledge of



Fig. 1. Crested Bunting *Melophus lathami* nest on ground, 2008.

Gobind Singh Bhargava



Fig. 2. Crested Bunting *Melophus lathami* nest in lantana bush, 2007.

the wildlife of Sitamata Wildlife Sanctuary, Pratapgarh district, Dhamotar was an excellent field man. One of the active nests was discovered quite close to Dhamotar *garh* (fort) where he spent most of his life and entertained his friends.

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Niranjan Sant

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**—In memoriam—**

**Jan-Hendrik Becking**

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**W. Alan Rodgers**

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