A report of the Lesser Fish Eagle
*Icthyophaga humilis* from Maharashtra, India

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The Lesser Fish Eagle *Icthyophaga humilis* is known to occur in South and Southeast Asia, from India to South Moluccas through Myanmar and Sumatra (Clark *et al.* 2016). In India, the species was once thought to be restricted to the foothills of the Himalayas, and to north-eastern India (Naoroji 2007), until a small population was discovered recently on the banks of River Cauvery, in Karnataka (Lethaby 2005). This was supported by a scrutiny of photographs from Cauvery Wildlife Sanctuary, thought to be those of Grey-headed Fish Eagle *I. ichthyaetus*, but were of the Lesser Fish Eagle (Praveen 2011). Further field surveys led to the documentation of the species in the states of Kerala, and Tamil Nadu (Praveen 2011). The northern Indian populations are recognised as the subspecies *plumbea* (Clark *et al.* 2016), however, the subspecific status of the peninsular populations is not known, and demands further study (Lethaby 2005). D’Abreau (1935) mentioned that specimens of Lesser Fish Eagle [=Himalayan Fish Eagle *I. humilis plumbeus*] were collected from Melghat, and were deposited in the Nagpur Central Museum. Rasmussen & Anderton (2012) reported that the Lesser Fish Eagle has been cited in Maharashtra, however, no specimens could be traced in museum collections. Besides, no record of the species is available for the western parts of the state. Here, we report the species from western Maharashtra.

On 14 January 2016, we observed and photographed an eagle that was soaring over a private wetland in the north-western part of Pune city, Maharashtra, India [96]. It was tentatively identified as the Grey-headed Fish Eagle, but upon further investigations and interactions with the experts, the species was identified as the Lesser Fish Eagle on the basis of the following morphological pointers, following Lethaby (2005), and Naoroji (2007):

1. Absence of dark terminal black band on the underside of the tail (vs. present in Grey-headed Fish Eagle) – a diagnostic feature of this species.
2. Seven ‘fingers’ of the hand (vs. eight to nine in Grey-headed Fish Eagle).
3. White patch at the base of outer primaries (vs. mostly absent in Grey-headed Fish Eagle).

Once the bird was correctly identified, we checked for its occurrence in published literature (Prasad 2004; Grimmett *et al.* 2011), and also combed through photographic records on public forums and online photographic portals like, India Nature Watch (www.indianaturewatch.net), Oriental Bird Images (www.orientalbirdimages.org), and India Biodiversity Portal (www.indiabiodiversity.org). Barring the aforementioned ones, there were no earlier records, making ours the first record for this species from Maharashtra, in recent times. Of the *Icthyophaga* species, the only earlier record of the Grey-headed Fish Eagle from western Maharashtra is from Mumbai (Prasad 2004). However, since this record antedates Lethaby (2005), it should be treated, as all other sight records of the Grey-headed Fish Eagle from the Western Ghats, with caution. Nonetheless, photographic records are available from the central Indian forests of Maharashtra, including Pench, and Tadoba (www.orientalbirdimages.org). The nearest northern locality for southern population of Lesser Fish Eagle is Ganeshgudi, Dandeli Anshi Tiger Reserve, Karnataka (Praveen 2011); the aerial distance between Ganeshgudi and Pune city being c. 370 km.

96. Lesser Fish Eagle *Icthyophaga humilis*, Pune, Maharashtra, India.
Birders and photographers regularly visit suitable habitats around Pune city throughout the year. The lack of any other sighting from them probably indicates that the bird we photographed was a straggler, as it is impossible to miss such a large raptor that often circles high in the sky.

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References

Rock Bunting Emberiza cia: An addition to the birds of Gujarat

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The Rock Bunting Emberiza cia is a polytypic species, with the race stracheyi resident in India. It breeds in the outer ranges of the western Himalayas, from the Afghan border, and in the western Himalayan Indian states of Jammu & Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh, and Uttarakhand, extending up to central Nepal (Rasmussen & Anderton 2012). During winter, it visits adjacent southern plains (Grimmett et al. 2011; Rasmussen & Anderton 2012). Despite this wintering range, actual records of the species from mainland India, away from the Himalayas, are scanty (Grimmett et al. 2011). This species has not been reported from Gujarat earlier (Khacher 1996; Parasharya et al. 2004). Here I present photographic evidence of its presence, from three locations in Gujarat.

Observations
I have photographed the Rock Bunting at three different locations in Gujarat, in the last few years (Fig. 1).

On 07 February 2007 I saw the species at Jarpara village (21.35ºN, 71.10ºE), near Dharoi town (Amreli District), on the Chalala–Dhari road. I was with Jitubhai Patel, a local farmer, who wanted to show an owl, in his farm, to me. There I photographed a male Rock Bunting, which was perched on a tree [97]. The rufous under parts, and white head with three black stripes were prominent characteristics, which helped in its identification.

A year later, on 27 January 2008, I photographed another bird [98], which was on the ground, enabling good views, and clear photographs. This was at ‘Kalodunger’, near Khavda (23.90ºN, 69.80ºE), in Kachchh District. Here, the bird was on the ground and I could observe it clearly and take photographs.

I saw the bird a third time, on 01 September 2014, at Velavadar Blackbuck National Park (22.00ºN, 72.00ºE), Bhavnagar District. A male bird was on the ground, along with Grey-neck Buntings Emberiza buchanani. My friend, Kasam Sama, was able to get close to the birds and take a picture [99]. The clear dorsal view of the tail, and back, along with the head profile, were sufficient to establish its identity.

Discussion
The Striolated Bunting Fringillaria striolata is a resident, and widespread, species in Gujarat. From a distance the Rock Bunting resembles the Striolated Bunting. So birdwatchers might tend to mistake a Rock Bunting for a Striolated Bunting. Especially since the Rock Bunting had not been recorded from Gujarat, though

Fig. 1. Locations in Gujarat, where the Rock Bunting has been photographed.