

Acknowledgement

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Rustic Bunting *Schoeniclus rusticus* from Bhutan

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219. Rustic Bunting showing its tuft.

The Rustic Bunting *Schoeniclus rusticus* is a Palearctic bunting with a large breeding range from Fennoscandia to eastern Siberia. It winters further south in central- and eastern-Asia (Copete *et al.* 2017). In the Indian Subcontinent it has been treated as a vagrant to Nepal (Grimmett *et al.* 2011), or as 'hypothetical' to South Asia (Rasmussen & Anderton 2012). Recently, it has been assessed as definitive for the subcontinent based on two sight records from Nepal (Praveen *et al.* 2017). It is not included in the 'India Checklist' (Praveen *et al.* 2016) though it is listed from north-western India (Copete *et al.* 2017) without further references. This note describes a 2014 photographic report of the Rustic Bunting from Bhutan.

While leading a birding trip to Bhutan in March–April 2014, we spent the last few days of birding in Paro Valley. On 09 April 2017, we climbed out of the valley and began our memorable climb up Chele La Pass, where the road tops out at 3988 m. This pass is undoubtedly the best place to find the resplendent Himalayan Monal *Lophophorus impejanus*, of which we got eight near the top, apart from 14 Blood Pheasants *Ithaginis cruentus*, and 11 Kalij Pheasants *Lophura leucomelanos*. After a full day of birding, we returned to the hotel at Paro (27.40°N, 89.40°E; c. 2270 m) where we saw and photographed a male Rustic Bunting, which was in its breeding plumage [218, 219]. Identification was straightforward: it was a 'tufted' bunting with black forehead, crown, and ear coverts, with a small white spot behind the eye and a prominent white supercilium. The throat and malar area were white, with a thin dark brown stripe separating the throat from the malar region. This is a facial pattern not present on any other bunting: Tristram's Bunting *S. tristrami* does not have a tuft and has a black throat, while Little Bunting *S. pusillus* does not show such a strong white facial pattern.

This is the first record of the Rustic Bunting for Bhutan (Spierenburg 2005), and the first photographic record for the Indian Subcontinent (Praveen *et al.* 2017b).



218. Rustic Bunting in Bhutan showing clear facial pattern.

Pics: Markus Lilje

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