

Little Owl *Athene noctua* at Se La Pass, Arunachal Pradesh, India

Wich'yanan Limparungpatthanakij, Jay Packer, Amy Packer & Firoz Hussain

Limparungpatthanakij, W., Packer, J., Packer, A., & Hussain, F., 2014. Little Owl *Athene noctua* at Se La Pass, Arunachal Pradesh, India. *Indian BIRDS* 13 (6): 160–161.

Wich'yanan Limparungpatthanakij, 233/529 Soi Nantanon 4, Nantawan Village, Srinakarin Road, Bangmueang, Mueang, Samut Prakan 10270, Thailand.

E-mail: lim.wichyanan@gmail.com [WL; Corresponding author]

Jay Packer, PO Box 569, Abilene, TX 79604, United States of America. E-mail: jay@jaypacker.com [JP]

Amy Packer, PO Box 569, Abilene, TX 79604, United States of America. [AP]

Firoz Hussain, 158 Old Balibat, Jorhat, Assam 785001, India. E-mail: firozhussain@hotmail.com [FH]

Manuscript received on 14 May 2017.

On 19 December 2016, at Se La Pass (27.51°N, 92.11°E; 4200 m asl), Arunachal Pradesh, India, led by Khandu Tamang, we spotted a small owl perched on a rock at 0830 hrs. The bird was observed for at least five minutes before it flew to a more distant rock near crevices. The habitat was open areas with rocky terrain and scattered trees. Its identity as Little Owl *Athene noctua* is confirmed with certainty as many photographs were taken. The elongated brown breast-streaks seen clearly in [216] readily rule out the similar Spotted Owlet *A. brama*, which differs in having brown spots and bars on the underparts (Grimmett *et al.* 2011). Photo [217] revealed that the owl had preyed upon a pika *Ochotona* sp., most likely *O. curzoniae*. Having birded in the area previous, Khandu Tamang and FH pointed out that this could be a significant record for the region.

The only documented record of a Little Owl in Arunachal Pradesh was a specimen collected in the Mishmi Hills (Baker 1926) c. 400 km to the east; the same paper wherein Baker described the *ludlowi* subspecies of this owl. He remarked that the bird from the Mishmi Hills was closest to the Tibetan *ludlowi* though smaller and darker, but Rasmussen & Anderton (2012) did not include its regional distribution further east of Sikkim. Further details of the Mishmi specimen are unavailable and it is unclear where exactly in the Mishmi Hills it was recorded, and the season when it was collected. However, the species is treated as resident in north-eastern Sikkim (Ganguli-Lachungpa *et al.* 2011), wherein a recent photograph is included, and was recently added to the Bhutan list, based on a record from Nub



217. Little Owl on pika kill.

Jay Packer

Tshonapatra in far western Bhutan (Wangdi 2015).

Though mainly crepuscular, the Little Owl is also active during daytime (Grimmett *et al.* 2011). Frank Ludlow found birds sunning in winter on walls and ruins (Baker 1927). The species is widespread in North Africa and temperate Eurasia, ranging from western Europe to eastern Asia. The individual at Se La Pass is presumed to belong to the Tibetan subspecies *ludlowi* as that is the subspecies known closest from the site. This is further supported by its chocolate-brown upperparts, rather than the paler sandy-brown of *bactriana*, which is another subspecies known to occur in the Himalayas (König & Weick 2008). However, it is important to note that bird, in much of its range in India, from Ladakh and the inner Himalayas, is believed to be intermediate between *bactriana* and *ludlowi*, except probably in Sikkim (Rasmussen & Anderton 2012).

Despite being, largely, a resident species, juveniles are stated to settle as far away as 600 km from natal sites (König & Weick 2008). The Little Owl may be resident at Se La Pass, as it is known to be sedentary on the Tibetan Plateau, and nearby mountainous regions of the Himalayas (Grimmett *et al.* 2011). The subspecies *ludlowi* is stated to be present throughout the year, at all elevations, between Gyantse and Phari (Baker 1927). Another sighting at the same site, on 01 May 2017, by Jainy Maria, Yann Muzika, and Rufikul Islam seemingly supports its likely resident status. Nevertheless, further investigation, and more reports of sightings from the area are needed to confirm its seasonal status.



Wich'yanan Limparungpatthanakij

216. Little Owl.

Acknowledgement

We would like to thank Tim Inskipp for valuable comments on the manuscript. Andrew T. Smith from Arizona State University and Robert C. Dowler from Angelo State University helped identify the pika.

References

Baker, E. C. Stuart. 1926. Untitled ["Mr. E.C. Stuart Baker sent descriptions of the following four new races of Oriental Owls..."]. *Bulletin of the British Ornithologists' Club*. XLVII: (cccix) 58–60.

Baker, E. C. S., 1927. The fauna of British India, including Ceylon and Burma. Birds. 2nd ed. London: Taylor and Francis. Vol. IV of 8 vols. Pp. i–xxiv, 1–471.

Ganguli-Lachungpa, Usha, Rahmani, A. R., & Islam, M. Z-u., 2011. "Eleven priority areas for conservation: Important birds areas of Sikkim." In *Biodiversity of Sikkim*

– exploring and conserving a global hotspot, by M. L. Arrawatia and S. Tambe, 281–302. Information and Public Relations Department Government of Sikkim. URL: http://sikkimforest.gov.in/Reports%20and%20Publications/Biodiversity-of-Sikkim/15%20Birds%20Usha_281-300%20web.pdf. [Accessed on 28 June 2017]

Grimmett, R., Inskipp, C., & Inskipp, T., 2011. *Birds of the Indian Subcontinent*. 2nd ed. London: Oxford University Press & Christopher Helm. Pp. 1–528.

König, C., & Weick, F., 2008. *Owls of the world*. 2nd ed. London: Christopher Helm. Pp. 1–528.

Rasmussen, P. C., & Anderton, J. C., 2012. *Birds of South Asia: the Ripley guide*. 2nd ed. Washington, D.C. and Barcelona: Smithsonian Institution and Lynx Edicions. 2 vols. Pp. 1–378; 1–683.

Wangdi, T., 2015. Four new birds discovered in Bhutan. Website URL: <http://www.kuenselonline.com/four-new-birds-discovered-in-bhutan/>. [Accessed on 11 May 2017]

Rustic Bunting *Schoeniclus rusticus* from Bhutan

Markus Lilje

Lilje, M., 2017. Rustic Bunting *Schoeniclus rusticus* from Bhutan. *Indian BIRDS* 13 (6): 161.

Markus Lilje, Rockjumper Birding Tours, P O Box 13972 Cascades 3202, South Africa. E-mail: markuslilje@gmail.com

Manuscript received on 17 September 2017.



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

References

Copete, J. L., Garcia, E. F. J., & Sharpe, C. J., 2017. Rustic Bunting (*Emberiza rustica*). In: del Hoyo, J., Elliott, A., Sargatal, J., Christie, D. A. & de Juana, E. (eds.). *Handbook of the Birds of the World Alive*. Lynx Edicions, Barcelona. (Retrieved from <http://www.hbw.com/node/61884> on 10 September 2017)

Grimmett, R., Inskipp, C., & Inskipp, T., 2011. *Birds of the Indian Subcontinent*. 2nd ed. London: Oxford University Press & Christopher Helm. Pp. 1–528.

Praveen J., Jayapal, R., & Pittie, A., 2017a. Checklist of the birds of India (v1.3). Website URL: <http://www.indianbirds.in/india/> [Date of publication: 30 June 2017]

Praveen J., Jayapal, R., Inskipp, T., Warakagoda, D., Thompson, P. M., Anderson, R. C. & Pittie, A., 2017b. Birds of the Indian subcontinent: Species not recorded from India. *Indian BIRDS* 13 (4): 93–101.

Rasmussen, P. C., & Anderton, J. C., 2012. *Birds of South Asia: the Ripley guide*. 2nd ed. Washington, D.C. and Barcelona: Smithsonian Institution and Lynx Edicions. 2 vols. Pp. 1–378; 1–683.

Spierenburg, P., 2005. *Birds in Bhutan. Status and distribution*. 1st ed. Bedford, U.K.: Oriental Bird Club. Pp. 1–383.