



194. Green-crowned Warbler showing cut in the eye-ring.



195. The crown of the Green-crowned Warbler sports a central, and lateral crown stripes.

Both: Pradyumna Krishna Majumdar

eastern Andhra Pradesh. It is occasionally recorded in the Gangetic Plains during migration (Grimmett et al. 2011; Rasmussen & Anderton 2011). We could not find any record of it being seen earlier in the Delhi National Capital Region (NCR), or Haryana (Vyas 2019; eBird 2021; Pittie 2021; Wikipedia 2021).

The date of observation, 31 May, is late for a spring migrant moving northwards to its breeding grounds in the Himalaya, and Rohtak, in Haryana, is well westwards of its known wintering range in central India. This individual may have been a late migrant, driven off course by an unseasonal rainstorm a day earlier, and represents a new record for Haryana State, and a new addition to the checklist of birds of the Delhi area.

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– Pradyumna Krishna Majumdar, Rakesh Ahlawat, Sarita Majumdar & Sarika Sharma

Dr. Pradyumna Krishna Majumdar, MS, Associate Professor, Orthopaedics Surgery, PGIMS, Rohtak, Haryana, India [Corresponding Author]  
Rakesh Ahlawat, Field Assistant, Ashoka University, Sonipat, India  
Sarita Majumdar, Staff Nurse, PGIMS, Rohtak, Haryana, India  
Dr. Sarika Sharma, MBBS, PGIMS, Rohtak, Haryana, India

## The Critically Endangered Yellow-breasted Bunting *Emberiza aureola* in southern Assam

The Yellow-breasted Bunting *Emberiza aureola* is a winter visitor to the Indian Subcontinent (Ali & Ripley 1987; Grimmett et al. 2011). North-eastern India, especially Assam, is its stronghold, from where it is listed as winter common (Choudhury 2000). In Assam, it is mainly distributed in the Brahmaputra River Valley. It was only in 2004 that the species was listed as Near Threatened, but from 2008 onwards it was treated as a threatened species and listed as Vulnerable in 2008, Endangered in 2013, and finally Critically Endangered in 2017 (BirdLife International 2017). This sudden change in its fortunes was warranted owing to large-scale trapping in its passage and non-breeding ranges. Large numbers of roosting birds were trapped with mist nets, for the pot, or sold in markets as 'sparrow' or 'rice birds', mainly in China and to some extent in Cambodia and Nepal (BirdLife International 2017). Thousands were caught for the annual food festival of Sanshui city, in southern China (Yuren 1996; Chan 2004).

In recent years, owing to above-mentioned reasons, this once common bird has become rare in Assam, although it has been reported with some regularity from around Kaziranga National Park and Maguri-Motapung *Beels*. However, there was no record from the Barak Valley (also known as Cachar Plains) region of southern Assam for more than a hundred years. It was reported from north-eastern part of Cachar district (Hume 1888) and recent reports from the neighbouring Sylhet Plains of Bangladesh and nearby Manipur Valley (photographic records in eBird and Facebook), so it would not be surprising to find it in the Barak Valley.

Here we report observations of the Yellow-breasted Bunting in Bakri *Haor* (*haor* is a complex of wetlands) (24.82°N, 92.61°E; 19 m asl) in southern Assam's Hailakandi District. The habitat in Bakri *Haor* comprises smaller scattered wetlands—the area becomes one large sheet of water during monsoon—sluggish water channels, short grassy areas, cultivated fallows, plots of winter paddy, and some patches with dense grass [196]. The dominant grass is *Vetiveria zizanioides*, with scattered *Arundo donax*, *Imperata cylindrica*, *Sachharum* spp., and other mixed grasses. On 26 and 30 December 2020, and on 24 and 30 January 2021, we carried out a bird survey in the *haor* area and recorded several grassland birds. On 30 December 2020 at 0850 h we spotted a few Black-faced Buntings *E. spodocephala* and a Dusky Warbler *Phylloscopus fuscatu*s when, suddenly, an unfamiliar bunting came into the area at 0900 h. We immediately took a few photographs. Somehow, it was presumed to be a female Black-faced and no detailed study of

the photographs was done. But while writing a note on the Black-faced species, we enlarged it on the computer's monitor and to our utter surprise we found it to be a female Yellow-breasted Bunting, a critically endangered species! Its broad yellowish supercilium and prominent white median-covert bar made it conspicuous [197]. Then we searched more photos and found out one more bird at some distance, about 300 m away.

It was also a female. The second author saw one more. So, in total there were three birds on that day. Then we saw two immature birds on 24 January 2021.



196. Yellow-breasted Bunting habitat, Bakri Haor, Hailakandi District.



197. Female Yellow-breasted Bunting in Bakri Haor, Hailakandi District.

Both: Anwaruddin Choudhury

Although other buntings such as Black-faced and Chestnut-eared *E. fucata* were seen on almost every visit, the Yellow-breasted was seen only on those two days.

This is, perhaps, the first record from Barak Valley region as well as the entire southern region of Assam, and a significant record at this time owing to its global conservation status. Bakri Haor could be a regular wintering site, which further observations would reveal. The small seasonal grassland patch of this haor, in the part where the buntings were observed, is small, less than 80 ha, but seemed to be an important area for several grassland birds such as Clamorous Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus stentoreus*, Dusky Warbler *Phylloscopus fuscatus*, Striated Grassbird *Megalurus palustris*, Zitting Cisticola *Cisticola juncidis*, Plain Prinia *Prinia inornata*, and Black-headed Munia *Lonchura atricapilla*, and in the nearby wetlands there were Lesser Adjutants *Leptoptilos javanicus*. There are such patches in other parts of Bakri Haor also and the total suitable area for the Yellow-breasted Bunting would be at least 300 ha. The area is under constant threat as parts of this tiny grassland are lost to seasonal cultivation annually. Some of these grassy patches may be earmarked for

seasonal protection as community reserves. Further surveys for this species need to be conducted in other wetland complexes in the Barak Valley.

Anwaruddin Choudhury thanks Burhan Mazumder, Hasimuddin Choudhury, and Fakhru Laskar for their help during field visits. Abdul Mannan Mazumder and Jorina Begum Laskar (Shamoli) for providing accommodation at Hailakandi. Special thanks to birders Firoz Hussain, Abidur Rahman and Rafiqul Islam for confirming the identification.

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- Anwaruddin Choudhury & Amir Sohail Choudhury**  
Anwaruddin Choudhury, The Rhino Foundation for nature in NE India, House No. 7, Near Gate No.1 of Nehru Stadium, Guwahati 781007, Assam, India.  
E-mail: [acbadru56@gmail.com](mailto:acbadru56@gmail.com). [Corresponding author]  
Amir Sohail Choudhury, Wildlife conservation and research laboratory, Department of Ecology and Environmental Science Assam University, Silchar, Assam, India.

## Status of the Blue-eared Kingfisher *Alcedo meninting* in the northern Eastern Ghats and the Rajmahal Hills of eastern India

The Blue-eared Kingfisher *Alcedo meninting* is widely distributed in the forests of the Western Ghats, north-eastern India, and South-east Asia. It inhabits riverine areas in low- to mid-elevation deciduous and evergreen forests (Grimmett et al., 2011; Woodall 2000). While it is a reported regularly from the Western Ghats and north-eastern India, records from the Eastern Ghats are relatively scarce. Here, we review and summarise the distribution of the Blue-eared Kingfisher in the east-central highlands, or the northern Eastern Ghats and the Rajmahal Hills, i.e., the hilly areas between the Godavari River and the northern tip of the Rajmahal Hills (Table 1).

### Historical records before 2000

Historically, the species has been sparsely recorded from the hills of northern Andhra Pradesh, Odisha, or Jharkhand. Bird surveys in the Simlipal Hills recorded this species only once (Abdulali 1972). Other records from the north of the Mahanadi are from Rajmahal and Manbhum in present day Jharkhand (Ball 1878). Southwards of the Mahanadi, there were two confirmed records, from Papikonda National Park, and an unconfirmed record from Cuttack (Ball 1878; attributed to A. O. Hume).

### Recent records after 1999

In recent times, the Blue-eared Kingfisher has been recorded only from two broad locations in the Eastern Ghats: the Simlipal Hills (including Simlipal Tiger Reserve and Kuldiha Wildlife Sanctuary) in northern Odisha, and the Papikonda Hills in northern Andhra