

Table 1: Capture details of Lesser Floricans in camera traps.

Sl. No.	Date	Time
1	18 May 2021	0608 h
2	20 May 2021	1201 h
3	21 May 2021	0658 h

While Lesser Floricans was once a widespread species in the Indian subcontinent, from Gujarat in the west till West Bengal in the east, and down south to Tamil Nadu and Kerala (Grimmett et al. 2011), recent records have been a trickle. Its primary habitat, a mosaic of grassland and scrubland as well as sparsely cultivated farmlands (Sankaran 1997), is facing serious threats that has resulted in dwindling of the population with IUCN uplisting it to Critically Endangered (BirdLife International 2023). Post 2010 reports from Maharashtra are from the districts of Nashik, Solapur and Akola (eBird 2023) as well as from the Warora tehsil in Chandrapur (Narwade et al. 2015); the last one being the nearest to our site, c. 45km from TATR. The previous checklist of TATR (Bayani & Dandekar 2017) did not include this species. Ours is probably the western most record of Lesser Florican in Maharashtra, and probably in India, in the recent years.

Lesser Florican has the potential to act as a flagship species for the conservation grasslands. These new evidences from the camera traps provide a role for the tiger reserves in central India to protect grassland obligate species like the floricans. Camera traps have in the past detected rare birds (see Shafi et al. 2018) and we trigger other forest department and scientists who use camera traps to scrutinize for rare birds that get opportunistically captured in them.

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A flock of Yellow-breasted Bunting *Emberiza aureola* in Majuli Island, Assam

Yellow-breasted Bunting is a Critically Endangered species as per IUCN Red List (BirdLife International 2023). In this article, we detail the sighting of a large group in the Majuli island of Assam, India.

Majuli (26.75°N – 27.20°N, 93.65°E – 94.58°E, 84m above asl) is assessed as an Important Bird and Biodiversity Area (IBA) in 2004 and as a Biodiversity Heritage Site in 2019 (Islam & Rahmani 2004; Assam State Biodiversity Board 2019). It is the biggest river island in the world (352 sq. km), located on the Brahmaputra River (Sankhua et al. 2005). The island is bounded by the main channel of the Brahmaputra River in the south, the *Kherkatia Suti* in the northeast, and the Subansiri River in the north. The main island is surrounded by over 20 sandy islets (locally known as *chapori*) (BirdLife International 2022).

On 23 November 2022, we were watching birds at Darbar Chapori (26.92°N, 94.21°E), a large sandbar on Majuli Island, dominated by the *Saccharum spontaneum* grass. Just before sunset, at around 1620 h, we were about to return from the grassland when a bird perched in the grass grabbed our attention. The bird was carefully observed and identified as a Black-faced bunting *E. spodocephala*. After about 3–4 seconds, it flew away, and another bird took its place. The new bird had noticeably brighter yellow underparts. Trying to keep ourselves hidden, the bird was observed with binoculars, and identified as a male Yellow-breasted Bunting [98]. Two more individuals of the species were sighted while leaving the area.



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98. Yellow-breasted Bunting perched on *Saccharum spontaneum* on 23 November 2022.

On the next day, before sunset, at around 1615 h, a huge flock of buntings arrived at the spot. The flock was seen coming from the north and constituted more than 500 individuals. Most of them flew to nearby islets, but some of them landed on the grassland patch in front of us. We quickly looked through our binoculars and located a few individuals while others remained hidden in the dense grass. Among the visible individuals, there were a few Black-faced Buntings and 35 Yellow-breasted Buntings. There could have been more of them in the flocks that landed in other islets and nearby grasslands.

There are records of huge flocks from Nepal (600+, Bhusal et al. 2020), Bangladesh (up to 150, Inam 2015), Myanmar

(up to 1100, Naing 2023), and Cambodia (up to 2870, Ly et al. 2022) in recent years. eBird considers the Yellow-breasted Bunting to be a sensitive species in India, Japan, and China (eBird 2023b). Some significant sightings from various locations in India are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Significant sightings of Yellow-breasted Bunting from India, sites from Assam are individually listed while only the state names are mentioned for the rest.¹

Sl. No.	Location	No. of individuals	Month & Year	Citation
1	West Bengal	200	January 2023	eBird (2023)
2	Manipur	80	November 2022	eBird (2023)
3	Arunachal Pradesh	10	May 2021	eBird (2023)
4	Meghalaya	5	October 2022	eBird (2023)
5	Nagaland	7	December 2021	eBird (2023)
6	Tripura	6	October 2022	eBird (2023)
7	Bakri Haor, southern Assam	3	December 2020	Choudhury & Choudhury (2021)
8	Kaziranga NP, Assam	90	August 2019	eBird (2023)
9	Maguri-Motapung Beel, Assam	8	April 2022	eBird (2023)
10	Nameri, Assam	12	March 2022	eBird (2023)
11	Manas NP, Assam	20	October 2022	eBird (2023)
12	Joysagar Doloni, Assam	100	April 2022	eBird (2023)
13	Jhanjimmukh-Kokilamukh, Assam	18	October 2017	eBird (2023); Mahanta et al. (2019)

¹ Date obtained from eBird on request, exact site names are not provided.

The remaining grasslands of Darbar Chapori are fragmented and degraded due to recent agricultural activities. Despite being a potential ecotourism hotspot, the area is largely ignored and is getting converted to agricultural land. Since the greater island area forms a good habitat for some of the threatened avifauna, the area should be prioritized for conservation.

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A Whinchat *Saxicola rubetra* in Chushot Marshes: A new species for Ladakh

On 04 January 2023 at 1735 h, I was returning home via the link road (34.06°N, 77.63°E) between Chushot Yokma and Chushot Kongma; a great spot for birders. I reached Chushot Marshes, and on the left side of the road, I saw an Accentor *Prunella* sp. like bird foraging on the muddy edge of a stream, and sometimes perching on sea buckthorns. As it was nearing dusk, the light was fading, and the conditions were extreme with temperature dropping down to -15°C. My first impression through binoculars was a Robin- *P. rubeculoides* or Brown Accentor *P. fulvescens*; both common birds that locally migrate in winter to lower elevations. I captured a few photographs and video (Stanba 2023). The bird was perched on a sea buckthorns and foraged on the muddy ground at regular intervals, flicking its tail. This went on for some time till darkness after which I left the spot.

Later, while looking at my media, the prominent white supercilium, streaking on the back as well as on head, and the slight rufous tone on the breast made me suspicious. Hence, I shared the photographs [99–101] with Ashwin Viswanathan and Andrew Paul Bailey and they suggested it is a Whinchat *Saxicola rubetra* based on its wide, long supercilium and a streaked back. When I posted the photographs in the Facebook forum *Ask Id of Indian Birds*, there also the members identified it as a Whinchat. Klemens Steiof additionally indicated the possibility that the bird may have had some health issues as it appeared to be in suspended moult.

Compared to typical Whinchats, this bird is in a very odd plumage. It has a combination of both fresh and worn feathers, and hence in suspended moult. The short bill, narrowly streaked dark crown, broadly streaked upperparts, pale sandy tinge on the breast and breast sides, whitish underparts [100], broad grey fringes to the lesser coverts, white fringes to primary coverts, the broadly streaked dark centres to the rump and upper-tail coverts [101] as well as the pale sides to the base of the tail visible in the video i had uploaded on ebird checklist (Stanba