

Goa were not in mint condition though it could be attributed to moulting rather than abraded feathers that is typically associated with captive birds. Though the records are spaced apart by two years, it is possible that the same individual is involved; it may have escaped from captivity a while back, and may have been roaming in the western coast. The other possibility where two different individuals are involved also exists, both resulting from a single event of escape from captivity. The third remote possibility would be two independent captive escapees while other combinations (one wild, one escapee) are also possible.

Though no knowledge exists on captive African Openbills in India, there exists 24 holdings worldwide with three in Asia (<https://www.zootierliste.de/>). Though this listing is by no means comprehensive, this can be considered relative to other species that are currently treated as of unknown origin in India. E.g., African Sacred Ibis *Threskiornis aethiopicus* has 232 holdings worldwide, 17 in Asia, while Spur-winged Lapwing *Vanellus spinosus* has 36 holdings with two in Asia. Hence, it appears African Openbill is a less popular aviary/zoo species compared to some others.

African Openbill is known to migrate from their breeding grounds in eastern and southern Africa to parts of the continent that are north of the equator, notably during October to April (Elliott et al. 2020a). Much of its movements are also nomadic and are in response to rainfall (Hancock et al. 1992). They are present in several countries in western Africa including Ethiopia, Kenya, and Tanzania.

However, quite recently, several records, all believed to be dispersers from wild populations, have been noted in several parts of the Arabian Peninsula since July 2021 (eBird 2024; OSME 2024), the timing matching with our Indian records. Photographs in eBird from the Arabian Peninsula showed several individuals with active wing moults. The first United Arab Emirates (UAE) record was of a flock of seven in July–August 2021, just a few months before the Goa record. The first Oman record was a flock of four, probably from the former flock, in August 2021, and at least one bird stayed till March 2022. Another dead bird was reported in January 2022 from Oman. Further records from Oman are of a single individual during the next season from October 2022 till March 2023. Two juveniles from a four-strong flock were photographed in south-western Saudi Arabia (KSA) in September 2021. Numbers increased from the subsequent January to about 19 birds in April 2022. There were reports of one from January–March 2023, and another one from February–March 2024. Clearly, all these records (eBird 2024; OSME 2024) show a recent migratory influx and our birds could have been a spillover from this recent event (Fig. 1).

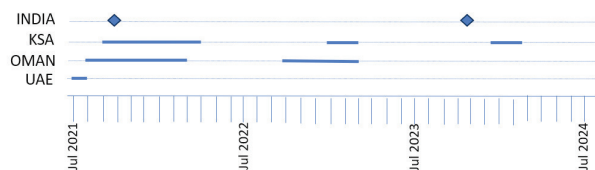


Fig 1. Records and periods of stay of African Openbills in various West Asian countries and India after 2021.

While a case can be put up for captive origins of African Openbills, evidence on the contrary, particularly from Arabian Peninsula, is so strong that it is advisable to consider both Goa and Kerala records as of birds of wild origins.

I am grateful to Praveen J. for his invaluable guidance and

assistance in preparing this manuscript. My thanks to Sreehari K. Mohan for his unwavering assistance as well as Gopika Suresh, Alhiba K. P., Asif Shah N. M., Abhijith M. and Kavaya Raj A. for their field support, and to *Kole Birders Collective* and Vivek Chandran A. for their constant support. My thanks to all the five anonymous referees who evaluated my find and provided opinion and additional information.

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Yellow-breasted Bunting *Emberiza aureola*: An addition to the avifauna of Uttarakhand and Himachal Pradesh, India

Yellow-breasted Bunting *Emberiza aureola* once bred across the northern Palaearctic from eastern Finland and western Russia, east to Kamchatka, south to northern Ukraine, north to Kazakhstan, Mongolia, north-eastern China, Sakhalin Island and northern Japan; however, after a precipitous decline, it is now thought to

have potentially completely disappeared from Finland, Belarus, Ukraine, and large parts of Russia (Kamp et al. 2015; Mlíkovský & Stýblo 2016). It migrates in winter to South and Southeast Asia and southern China (Mlíkovský & Stýblo 2016). Vagrants have been recorded as west as in western Europe (north up to Iceland and west up to Ireland, Britain, and Spain), Turkey, and much of the Middle East, Egypt, Pakistan, and south-eastern to Philippines, Borneo, Brunei, and even to Alaska (Copete & Sharpe 2020; Birdlife International 2024). This note describes two sightings of Yellow-breasted Bunting from Himachal Pradesh and its regular wintering records from Baur Reservoir, Uttarakhand.

Baur Reservoir, Uttarakhand

The Baur Dam is an embankment dam built on the Baur and Kakrala Rivers in the Udham Singh Nagar District of Uttarakhand. Patches of reedbeds and grasslands have developed around the reservoir. There is also scrubland with scattered trees, cultivated fields and villages in the surroundings of this reservoir. On 21 December 2019, RP was birding around mustard fields in the outflow area of this dam (29.132°N, 79.256°E; c.250 m asl). A bunting with bright yellow underparts with a distinct chestnut breast band and prominent facial markings was photographed [164]. There was a broad band of white on its inner wing coverts. On the basis of these features, it was identified as a male Yellow-breasted Bunting. Multiple birds of both sexes were recorded regularly during the past five winters at Baur Reservoir by RP from 2019–20 until 2023–24. These birds were mostly observed feeding on the ground in mustard fields close to the reservoir. Sometimes the birds were also seen in fields with paddy stubble. As it is a sensitive species in eBird, the details of sightings are not available publicly in eBird. On the basis of the data provided by eBird after request and by searching the Indian Birds Facebook group, it was noted that every year, it was recorded on multiple occasions by several birders from late November to late February, many of whom were accompanied by RP. Mostly 1–7 birds were seen, and a maximum of 12 birds were seen on 22 November 2023 by RP.



Rajesh Panwar

164. A male Yellow-breasted Bunting showing bright yellow underparts and a broad white band on the wings at Baur Reservoir, Uttarakhand.

Great Himalayan National Park, Himachal Pradesh

MS visited Sainj Valley in the Great Himalayan National Park (GHNP), Kullu District, Himachal Pradesh, in early May 2023. The GHNP is a large protected area with altitudes ranging between 1,500 and 5,805 m and is a designated World Heritage Natural Site (Rahmani et al. 2016). On 09 May at 0825 h, MS reached near a small, open, grassy patch very close to the Humkhani

meadow (31.780°N, 77.485°E; c.2,860 m asl). While walking on the trail, MS saw a flock of c.25 sparrow-sized birds foraging on the ground. Since the sun was behind the flock, it took a moment to identify these as Plain Mountain Finches *Leucosticte nemoricola*. MS scanned the flock using binoculars and found a completely different looking bird. It was a bunting with significant yellow on its underparts [165]. Soon thereafter, the flock took off after an alarm call, and the bunting perched on a Kharshu oak *Quercus semecarpifolia* for a few minutes before flying away. Photographs were taken when the bird was on the ground and while it perched on the tree. After spending an hour or so in the area, MS could not relocate the bunting. It was a medium-sized bunting with a well-marked face, having a broad, yellowish white supercilium, black bordered ear coverts, and black lateral crown stripes. The mantle was boldly streaked, and there were two prominent, buff wing bars. The underparts were pale yellow with streaking on the throat and flanks. The lower mandible was pale. After the photographs were analyzed, it was identified as a likely female Yellow-breasted Bunting, which was not considered initially, as it was outside its usual distribution range and habitat. It was probably a female because of pale yellow underparts and streaking on the throat. Female of Yellow-breasted can be confused with females of several other regional bunting species whose underparts are yellow. It was differentiated from the Yellowhammer *E. citrinella*, which is frequently observed in the state by its smaller size, different structure, pale lower mandible, and prominent white wing-bar. The Red-headed Bunting *E. bruniceps* and Black-headed Bunting *E. melanocephala* females were easily ruled out by the presence of prominent streaking on upperparts and flanks and a prominent head pattern. The similar Chestnut Bunting *E. rutila* female was separated by the presence of a more prominent head pattern and whitish wing bar. The female Black-faced Bunting *E. spodocephala* was ruled out by the presence of a rufous on the rump and a more prominent head pattern. (Grimmett et al. 1998; Rasmussen & Anderton 2012; Shirhai & Svensson 2018)



Mukesh Sehgal

165. Yellow-breasted Bunting at Humkhani, Great Himalayan National Park, Himachal Pradesh, on 09 May 2023, showing a prominent head pattern.

Sissu Lake, Himachal Pradesh

On 15 May 2023, DS visited Sissu Lake, Lahaul & Spiti District, Himachal Pradesh (32.475°N, 77.128°E; c.3,034 m asl) for birding. Sissu Lake is a small, high-altitude, horse-shoe shaped

lake, measuring c.400x200 sq. m. A pool with surrounding marsh is formed on the south-eastern side of the lake by a small stream [166]. The habitat at this lake is unique to the Lahaul Valley, which provides a suitable resting and feeding place for many migratory birds. DO spotted a bunting with prominent yellow on its face and underparts feeding near the water edge of this pool. The face was very well marked, with prominent black and chestnut borders to the ear coverts, lateral crown stripe and moustachial stripes. The boldly streaked upperparts showed significant chestnut, mainly on scapulars and rump. There were two prominent whitish wing bars. There was a narrow and broken chestnut band over the breast. The underparts were bright yellow, with paler, well-streaked flanks. The lower mandible was pale. On the basis of its distinctive facial pattern, chestnut rump, prominent wing bars and prominent streaking, it was later identified as Yellow-breasted Bunting. It was perhaps a male, as it was brightly coloured with warm chestnut in plumage, including a warm chestnut rump, small black blotches on the face and a breast band. RR recorded this bunting on the same evening, and CA photographed it on 17 May 2023 [167]. During the first few days of stay, the bird was seen feeding along with wagtails *Motacilla* sp. and was taking off along with these wagtails on disturbance. Later, the wagtails left the place to resume their migration, and then, the bird was observed feeding alone on small invertebrates near the water edge and on grass seeds in the surrounding areas. It was extremely bold when it was seen alone. In the afternoon, it was mostly observed resting in a shrub, growing inside the pond, and rarely in the surrounding shrubs. It was frequently seen raising the tail, almost raised vertically. The last sighting was on 19 May 2023.

Dipender Othangba



166. Habitat in Sissu Lake, Lahaul Valley, which contains pools and small marshes, where Yellow-breasted Bunting was reported.

C. Abhinav



167. Yellow-breasted Bunting at Sissu Lake, Himachal Pradesh on 17 May 2023.

Discussion

In the Indian Subcontinent, Yellow-breasted Bunting winters in the Himalayan foothills, mainly from central Nepal to the Assam Valley, hills south and east of Brahmaputra and north-eastern Bangladesh, sporadic further west in the Himalayan foothills and vagrant to Pakistan (Rasmussen & Anderton 2012). There have been scattered records of Yellow-breasted Bunting in western peninsular India, from Gujarat to southernmost Tamil Nadu (Rajeevan & Bijumon 2018; Mengar 2019; eBird 2024) and the Andaman & Nicobar Islands (Gokulakrishnan et al. 2018). The Yellow-breasted Bunting was one of the most abundant songbirds of the Palearctic, with a very large breeding range; however, its population declined by 84.3–94.7% between 1980 and 2013, and the species' range contracted by 5,000 km (Kamp et al. 2015). This rapid decrease in population is due to the rampant illegal trapping of the species in its passage and non-breeding ranges in China (Kamp et al. 2015; Birdlife International 2024). Thus, its previous 'Least Concern' IUCN status changed rapidly after 2004, and ultimately, it was uplisted to 'Critically Endangered' in 2017 (Birdlife International 2024). Owing to this decline in population, once common species in Northeast India (Rasmussen & Anderton 2012), Yellow-breasted Bunting has also become rare in this region (Choudhury & Choudhury 2021). However, flocks of variable sizes are still observed in few places in this region (Saikia & Choudhury 2023).

The species was not mentioned from Uttarakhand by Mohan & Sondhi (2017), and we could not find any other published records or records on social media before the above-mentioned records from the Baur Reservoir. Thus, the record of Yellow-breasted Bunting from the Baur Reservoir, which occurred in 2019, is the first record for Uttarakhand. More importantly, it seems to be a regular wintering ground for this critically endangered species, as it has been recorded regularly at this location for the past five winters. Rasmussen & Anderton (2012) mentioned it as sporadic in the Himalayan foothills, further west of Central Nepal; however, the present records further extend its regular wintering range to Uttarakhand. These records also urge the protection of this habitat to safeguard the species.

The birds seen in the records from Himachal Pradesh were probably migrating to their breeding grounds further north, as the places where the birds were recorded during spring migration are high-altitude regions, which are not wintering habitats (cultivation and grasslands) of the species (Grimmett et al. 1998), and the nearest breeding grounds in western-most Mongolia and eastern-most Tajikistan are c.2,000 km away (as seen in the distribution map by Copete & Sharpe 2020 and measured via Google Maps). Spring migration occurs during April to June, and many birds are still in their wintering grounds in May (Copete & Sharpe 2020). The sightings of Yellow-breasted Buntings among a flock of Plain Mountain Finches and wagtails are not unusual, as the species is highly gregarious in its wintering grounds and is often seen with other buntings and munias (Rasmussen & Anderton 2012). We could not find any records of Yellow-breasted Bunting in prominent works from Himachal Pradesh (den Besten 2004; Dhadwal 2011, 2018), or in Grimmett et al. (2011) or in eBird (2024), making these records first for the state. The records of Yellow-breasted Bunting from Himachal Pradesh are not surprising, as the birds were migrating and species has been reported from the surrounding states and Union Territories (Grimmett et al. 2011). Yellow-breasted Bunting was photographed near the

Gharana Wetland, Union Territory of Jammu & Kashmir, on 27 January 2020 (Kumar 2020). The species was reported twice from Jagadhari, Yamunanagar District, Haryana, on 22 February 1920 and 05 March 1935 (Jones 1927; Waite 1937). In Punjab, the species was reported once from Harike Wetland on 01 April 1994 (Robson 1994), and a flock of 13 buntings was recorded at Kiratpur, Rupnagar District, on 04 and 05 January 1997 (Robson 1997). Further west, there have been more recent records from Pakistan (Karam & Ahmed 2021).

CA thanks Pritam Baruah for helping in sexing the birds.

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Observations on the nesting ecology of the Long-tailed Broadbill *Psarisomus dalhousiae*

Birds have evolved a variety of parental behaviours to reduce predator-induced nest loss, which includes the construction of elaborate, cryptic or concealed nests; distraction displays; and nest guarding (Gottfried 1979). The quality of the breeding habitat may directly affect the survival and development of progeny; therefore, the selection of a suitable nest site is an important factor affecting the reproductive success of birds (Zhou et al. 2020). The Long-tailed Broadbill *Psarisomus dalhousiae* is distributed in tropical and sub-tropical forests from the northwestern Himalayas to Southeast Asia (Billerman et al. 2022).

Long-tailed Broadbills are gregarious species that are often observed in small flocks. In India, Long-tailed Broadbills breed from March to August. They build large pear-shaped hanging nests, usually at the end of a branch, typically near a water body, with small pieces of dry twigs/sticks, roots, leaves, and grasses. (Cameron & Harrison 1978; Bruce 2020). They are also known to nest on electricity transmission lines (Zhou et al. 2020). A study carried out in China revealed that these birds prefer to nest on power lines (88.5%), and nest site selection is affected mainly by predation pressure and food resources (Zhou et al. 2020).



168. A pair of Long-tailed Broadbill building a nest near Kolukhet village, Dehradun-Mussoorie Road.

On 26 May 2022, one nest of Long-tailed Broadbill was observed (30.416°N, 78.079°E) near Kolukhet village, which is located across the Dehradun-Mussoorie Road, Uttarakhand.