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– Krutarth Kshirsagar

Dr. Krutarth Kshirsagar, Plot No.28, Sahawas Society, Karvenagar, Pune 411052, Maharashtra, India. Email: [krutarth.kshirsagar@gmail.com](mailto:krutarth.kshirsagar@gmail.com) [Corresponding author]

## Reports of Little Bunting *Emberiza pusilla* from Tripura, Jharkhand, Haryana, Punjab, and Rajasthan in 2024–2025

The Little Bunting *Emberiza pusilla* breeds from northern Scandinavia, eastwards through northern Russia and Siberia (Byers et al. 1995). In the non-breeding season, it is found in eastern Nepal, northeastern India, northern and central Myanmar, northern Thailand, northern Laos, northern Vietnam, southern China, and Taiwan (Byers et al. 1995; Copete 2020). It is known as vagrant to most European countries, including Iceland, and to the Canary Islands, Morocco, Algeria, Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan, Egypt, Iran, Kuwait, Oman, the United Arab Emirates, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Borneo, the Philippines, Alaska and California (Byers et al. 1995). In the non-breeding period, it is found in a variety of open and semi-open habitats, such as fringes of forest, scrubby hillsides, crop fields, stubble and paddy fields, gardens and orchards, edges of roads and paths, riverbanks, and bushy areas near marshes (Byers et al. 1995; Copete 2020). This note describes unusual sightings from northern and eastern India, resulting in the addition of this species to the avifauna lists of Tripura, Haryana, Punjab, and Rajasthan, as well as a first photographic record from Jharkhand. Since males and females are indistinguishable, identification of sex was not possible. Otherwise, relevant identification features have been mentioned for each observation.

### Khilpara, Sukhsagar, Gomati District, Tripura

On 01 November 2024, a Black-faced Bunting *E. spodocephala* was spotted by PC, SB, and DC in a marshy area known as Sukhsagar (23.520°N, 91.496°E; c.22 m asl), near Udaipur city in the Gomti District of Tripura. Inspired by this discovery, PC and his co-birders, SB, DC, SK & SG, visited the location on 02 November 2024 and successfully photographed the Black-faced Bunting. While PC was taking pictures, another bunting caught his attention. At first glance, he thought it to be a Chestnut-eared Bunting *E. fucata*. So, after a couple of photos, he did not pay much attention to it since he already had good images of that species. Later, SB identified the bird from the photos as a Little Bunting [64]. This bird was identified based on the combination of chestnut ear-coverts bordered black with a pale spot, chestnut lores, black lateral crown stripes, and grey nape, thus ruling out all possible confusion species and confirming it as a Little Bunting. Excited by the initial sighting, they searched extensively for the bird but could not spot it again. The bird was not seen for nearly two months thereafter, when on 31 December 2024, two individuals were sighted again near the same location, this time by PC and SB, marking the second recorded observation of this species in Tripura. This encounter rekindles the interest

in the habitat and movements of Little Buntings in the region, suggesting the possibility of a more sustained presence than previously thought.



Shawon Kuri

64. Adult non-breeding Little Bunting, Sukhsagar, Tripura.

### Massanjore Dam, Dumka District, Jharkhand

Massanjore is located on the northeastern fringes of the Chota Nagpur Plateau in Dumka District, Jharkhand. This area features undulating terrain, shallow valleys, and a network of streams and rivers, supporting a diverse range of habitats, including dry deciduous forests, scrublands, and fallow lands. The Massanjore Reservoir, created on the Mayurakshi River, enhances habitat diversity by providing a stable aquatic ecosystem. These varied landscapes and rich habitat heterogeneity make Massanjore a vital haven for a diverse array of wildlife, including migratory birds.

On 30 November 2024, BS, PC, MKC, SD & AM were out for birding near Massanjore Dam (24.109°N, 87.297°E; c.123 m asl). At 0930 h, they came across a Little Bunting [65]. The combination of small stature with a straight culmen, a pale reddish-brown median crown stripe bordered by darker crown sides, and light reddish brown lores with a pale supercilium identified it as a Little Bunting. Further supporting this identification are the white outer-tail feathers, pale eye-ring, reddish-brown ear coverts bordered by a dark line at the rear, and a pale spot in the rear corner of the ear coverts (Grimmett et al. 2011; Copete 2020).

Following its first recorded observation on 30 November 2024, the Little Bunting was also sighted at Massanjore on 04, 15, and 30 January 2025, confirming its continued presence there. Ara (1976) reported a single sighting of the Little Bunting from the Kechki area of erstwhile Bihar (now in Jharkhand).



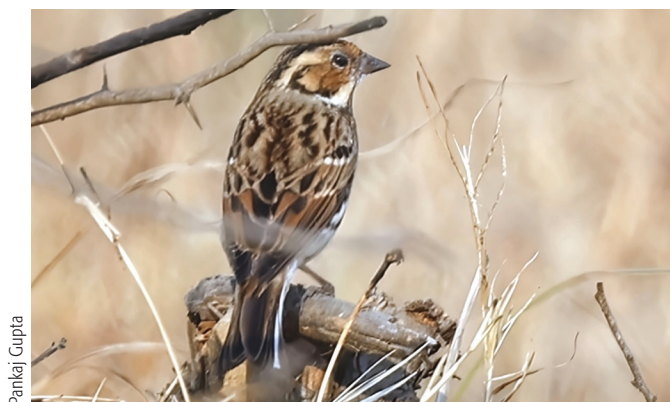
Bandeep Sinha

65. Adult non-breeding Little Bunting, Massanjore Dam, Jharkhand.

However, it was not a photographic record. Therefore, these recent photographic records, spanning a period of two months and occurring nearly five decades after the last report, are highly significant for understanding the status of the Little Bunting in Jharkhand. These observations also suggest that the species may be wintering in the region over an extended period. Further monitoring could provide valuable insights into its seasonal movements and habitat preferences in eastern India.

### Sultanpur Flats, Gurugram, Haryana

On 01 December 2024, PG, AG, and their team were conducting a bird count at Sultanpur National Park, Gurugram, Haryana. Following a lunch break, the group proceeded to survey the Sultanpur flats (28.456°N, 76.891°E; c.215 m asl). Weather conditions were favorable for birding, with moderate temperatures and good visibility. While scanning the area, a flock of approximately 15 Tree Pipits *Anthus trivialis* was seen perched on a *Neltuma juliflora* tree. Accompanying them was a flock of Indian Silverbills *Euodice malabarica*, both flocks appearing to visit the area to drink water. Among them, a single Little Bunting was observed to be foraging. No direct interaction between the Little Bunting and the Tree Pipits or Indian Silverbills was noted. The bunting was seen hopping into the grass to feed before returning to perch on the same tree [66]. It was primarily identified based on a combination of chestnut ear-coverts, a distinct pale spot on the rear of the ear-coverts, a post-orbital line wrapping around the rear edge of the ear-coverts, a dark lateral crown-stripe, and a uniform grey-brown mantle streaked dark brown (Grimmett et al. 2011; Rasmussen & Anderton 2012). This bird was obviously an adult in non-breeding plumage as the crown-stripe was somewhat obscured and there was less rufous on the face. Common Reed Bunting *E. schoeniclus* in female and non-breeding plumage may look similar to Little Bunting, but never shows contrasting chestnut ear-coverts. The Chestnut-eared Bunting also shows prominent chestnut ear-coverts but lacks dark lateral crown-stripes (Byers et al. 1995). After a social media post, this individual was seen and photographed by other bird watchers for at least a week after the current observation.



Pankaj Gupta

66. Adult non-breeding Little Bunting, Sultanpur Flats, Gurugram, Haryana.

### Kokowal Forest, near Garhshankar, Punjab

On 03 December 2024, at 1030 h, PSA was bird watching in the Kokowal forest area (31.301°N, 76.272°E; c.492 m asl) at the base of the Shivalik foothills, north of Garhshankar, Hoshiarpur District, Punjab. In the scrub forest with *Lantana camara* undergrowth, he found a bunting in the company of other species such as Sind Sparrows *Passer pyrrhonotus* and Common

Rosefinches *Carpodacus erythrinus*. He initially thought it was a Chestnut-eared Bunting because of the rufous ear-coverts. However, a discussion on social media confirmed the bird as a Little Bunting [67]. This individual was not well marked, and the plumage was duller than typical non-breeding adults. However, the face pattern was clearly that of a Little Bunting. Therefore, it was identified as a first-winter bird. After about two and a half months, the Little Bunting was observed again around the same location on 14 January 2025 and 15 February 2025, and this time, the birds were in better-marked adult plumage. Thus, it is possible that the birds were wintering in this area.



Paramoor Singh Anjal

67. First-winter Little Bunting, Kokowal forest near Garhshankar, Punjab.

### Mount Abu, Sirohi District, Rajasthan

On 12 December 2024 at 1645 h, SZ spotted a Little Bunting [68] in the agricultural fields situated on the periphery of Oriya village (24.627°N, 72.760°E; c.1,325 m asl), located 08 km north-east of Mount Abu, Rajasthan. SZ was observing Tree Pipits foraging on the ground, which were routinely being sighted in the same area, until a Little Bunting was unexpectedly spotted foraging along with the Tree Pipits. It was easily identified from the rusty central crown stripe, dark lateral crown stripes, a pale eye-ring, and a fine dark border to the rear of its cheeks. The bird was observed foraging in an uncultivated crop field scattered with cut, decaying grass and weeds, located off the Achalgarh Road and near Oriya Duck Pond. Most crop fields in the area were recently tilled and left uncultivated. However, an adjoining field was cultivated with wheat, green peas, and garlic, bordered by a patch of grass and stagnant water. Sub-zero night-time temperatures were consistently recorded during the week, which,



Sahil Zutshi

68. Adult Little Bunting near Oriya village, Mount Abu, Rajasthan.



although not uncommon during winters at Mount Abu, coincided with a cold wave gripping North India. The area was surveyed the following morning, and 12 individuals were spotted. They were seen perched on dry grass and shrubs. Some individuals periodically perched on wild rose hedges bordering the area and on electrical wires running across the field, before returning to forage on seeds of flattened grass in a marshy area. On 14 December 2024, the field on which they were found foraging was tilled, and the area began experiencing disturbance from farmers and tractors. However, 4-6 individuals were spotted in the area until 16 December 2024, after which the birds appeared to have moved from the area.

## Discussion

In the Indian Subcontinent, the Little Bunting occurs as a winter visitor, primarily to the eastern parts of the region, from central Nepal to Arunachal Pradesh, northern Bengal, the Assam Valley, hills south of the Brahmaputra, Meghalaya, Nagaland, Manipur, Mizoram, and northeast Bangladesh. It is mostly found below 1,800 m asl but can be observed at higher altitudes during passage. Several records exist in the Western Himalaya from northern Kashmir to western Nepal. It is also reported occasionally from southern West Bengal, Andaman & Nicobar Islands, and southwest Bangladesh (Rasmussen & Anderton 2012; SolB 2023; eBird 2024). There are at least seven independent reports of Little Bunting from western Peninsular India, Maharashtra, Karnataka, and Kerala (Eaton & Mathew 2016; Praveen et al. 2018; eBird 2024).

However, this species has not been mentioned from Tripura, Haryana, Rajasthan, and Punjab in published literature (Grimmett et al. 2011; Rasmussen & Anderton 2012; Vyas 2015; Kalsi et al. 2019; Kumar & Chakrabarti 2019), and we could not find any records on social media and citizen science platforms. Thus, the records from Punjab, Haryana, Rajasthan, and Tripura, presented in this work, represent the first records from these states. The record from Jharkhand is the first photographic record from the state. Other than the above observations, there have been increasing sightings from Uttarakhand and southern West Bengal. In the last decade, eBird reports about 36 individuals across 13 sightings from Uttarakhand and over 50 individuals from southern West Bengal (eBird 2024). Multiple sightings from different states away from the known distribution range, especially the flock of 12 individuals in Rajasthan, coupled with repeat sightings from Tripura, Jharkhand, and Punjab, indicate a possible extension in its wintering range. Perhaps, the trend in the next few years will better indicate whether the above sightings were instances of vagrancy or a true range extension.

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- Parthasarathi Chakrabarti, Between Bridge and Post Office, Abhoynagar, Agartala, 799005, Tripura. E-mail: [parthaagt@gmail.com](mailto:parthaagt@gmail.com) [PC]
- Suman Biswas, House of Lt. Sudhir Ch. Biswas, VPO Kalshimura, 799102, Sepahijala District, Tripura. E-mail: [sumanbiswasudp@gmail.com](mailto:sumanbiswasudp@gmail.com) [SB]
- Dipayan Chakraborty, GPRA Complex, Gandhigram, 799012, Tripura. Email: [piku511985@gmail.com](mailto:piku511985@gmail.com) [DC]
- Shawon Kuri, 2<sup>nd</sup> Floor, H.K. Tower, Opposite 22 Ward Office, Banamalipur, Agartala, 799001, Tripura. E-mail: [kuri.shawon@gmail.com](mailto:kuri.shawon@gmail.com) [SK]
- Sova Ghosh, C/o Biplab Ghosh, VPO Lankamura, 799009, Agartala, Tripura. E-mail: [gsova2020@gmail.com](mailto:gsova2020@gmail.com) [SG]
- Banideep Sinha, Suri Vidyasagar College, Burdwan University, Suri, 731101, Birbhum, West Bengal. E-mail: [banideep72@gmail.com](mailto:banideep72@gmail.com) [BS]
- Prasenjit Chowdhury, Jalpaiguri Government Engineering College, Jalpaiguri, 735102, Jalpaiguri, West Bengal. E-mail: [wildtale91@gmail.com](mailto:wildtale91@gmail.com) [PC]
- Manish Kumar Chattopadhyay, Maulana Abul Kalam Azad University of Technology, Kolkata,, 7000064, West Bengal. E-mail: [manish.ee22@gmail.com](mailto:manish.ee22@gmail.com) [MKC]
- Saikat Das, Patha Bhavana, Visva Bharati, Santiniketan, 731235, Birbhum, West Bengal. E-mail: [saikatgkh@gmail.com](mailto:saikatgkh@gmail.com) [SD]
- Arkajyoti Mukherjee, Indian Institute of Technology, Kharagpur 721302, West Bengal. E-mail: [arkajyoti02@gmail.com](mailto:arkajyoti02@gmail.com) [AM]
- Pankaj Gupta, House No. 5164, Sector B, Pocket7, Vasant Kunj, 110070, New Delhi. E-mail: [pankajgupta\\_fm@yahoo.co.in](mailto:pankajgupta_fm@yahoo.co.in) [PG]
- Arnav Gupta, House No. 5164, Sector B, Pocket7, Vasant Kunj, 110070, New Delhi. E-mail: [arnavgupta1209@gmail.com](mailto:arnavgupta1209@gmail.com) [AG]
- Paramnoor Singh Antaal, House No. 26, Urban Estate Phase-I, Patiala, 147002, Punjab. E-mail: [aroopkamal@gmail.com](mailto:aroopkamal@gmail.com) [PSA]
- Sahil Zutshi, Irupidam, Oriya, Mt. Abu, Sirohi District, 307501, Rajasthan. E-mail: [sahilzutshi@hotmail.com](mailto:sahilzutshi@hotmail.com) [SZ]
- Gurpartap Singh, 1969, Sector 64, Mohali 160062, District Sahibzada Ajit Singh Nagar, Punjab. E-mail: [prof.gurpartap.singh@gmail.com](mailto:prof.gurpartap.singh@gmail.com) [GPS] [Corresponding author]

## The Black-throated Munia *Lonchura kelaarti vernayi* in Odisha, India

The Black-throated Munia *Lonchura kelaarti* is a small passerine bird in the family Estrildidae. It comprises three subspecies in the Indian Subcontinent: the nominate *L. k. kelaarti* occurring in Sri Lanka (Payne 2020); *L. k. vernayi* occurring in eastern India in the north-eastern Ghats of southern Odisha (historical) and north-eastern Andhra Pradesh, and a more widely distributed western subspecies *L. k. jerdoni*. The last one is sporadic and local in north-western Ghats from Mumbai region till about Goa but more regular in the Western Ghats of Karnataka and further south as well as in Biligirirangans, Servarayan, and Kolli hills in south-eastern Ghats and outcrops of Palani and Vasundhara hills