

## Asian Dowitcher...

reached Jamnagar, in western Gujarat, which lies in the Central Asian - Indian Flyway. This can be a case of it being a vagrant here. In this region, previously it has been recorded at Pirotan and Narara Island in the Marine National Park (Gulf of Kachchh) and also at Khijadia Bird Sanctuary, Jamnagar (Bhatt 2008, Forsten & Lindholm 2008, Robson 2012). This is the fourth record of an Asian Dowitcher from Gujarat. It should also be noted that the Asian Dowitcher is a 'Near Threatened' species (BirdLife International 2019) and hence, this sighting assumes importance.



Rajdeepsinh Jadeja

This Asian Dowitcher in Jamnagar is being watched from dawn to dusk by some or the other birders and photographers every day since it was found. We now wish and very much hope that the bird stays here safely and leaves for its breeding ground only after acquiring breeding colours. As of 10 March 2019, it is still present in the area; a total of more than two months

of stay here. This is one of the rare instances when an Asian Dowitcher has been observed in India over such a long period and its activities and foraging/feeding monitored closely.



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## Sighting of Yellow-breasted Bunting *Emberiza aureola* near Kheda: an addition to the avifauna of Gujarat

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The Yellow-breasted Bunting (*Emberiza aureola*) is a passerine bird, of the bunting family (*Emberizidae*) that is found across Eurasia. The species is listed as 'Critically Endangered' due to extremely rapid population decline throughout its range (BirdLife International 2019). It is a winter visitor to India, mainly to the foothills of the Himalayas, and in eastern and Northeast India (Grimmett *et al.* 2011, Rasmussen & Anderton 2012).

On 12 January 2019, I was on the way to Pariej Lake (22° 33' 08" N, 72° 37' 05" E), near Kheda. It was a foggy morning. Suddenly, a bird came and perched in front of my car and I was lucky to take a few photos of the bird before it disappeared in the fields



Bhavesh Mengar

with flocks of Red-headed Buntings (*Emberiza bruniceps*) and Black-headed Buntings (*Emberiza melanocephala*).

Later, while reviewing the images, I was confused regarding the identification of this bird. I thought it could be some bunting (*Emberiza* sp.) or some weaver (*Ploceus* sp.), and so I put the images on a Whatsapp group for identification help. It was confirmed as a Yellow-breasted Bunting with the help of Dr. Pankaj Maheria and senior birder Prasad Ganpule. This is the first photographic record of a Yellow-breasted Bunting in Gujarat and it is an addition to the avifauna of the state.

[*The Yellow-breasted Bunting breeds from Europe, across Russia, in NE Mongolia and NE China and in far eastern Russia and winters in S and SE Asia* (Copete & Sharpe 2019). As explained here by the author, it is now a 'Critically Endangered' species.

The individual from Pariej showed a white wing covert patch, yellow throat and whitish supercilium. The white wing patch was quite conspicuous in the photos and hence, it was initially identified as an immature Yellow-breasted Bunting by referring to Peltomäki & Jantunen (2000) and Copete & Sharpe (2019). However, since the identification is difficult, we sent the images to Jari Peltomäki and Arend Wassink, who have extensive experience with the species.

Jari Peltomäki replied (email dated 18 January 2019) that 'to me it looks like 100% sure Yellow-breasted Bunting and there are few features supporting this identification: 1) mainly white median coverts 2) pink base of bill 3) yellow throat extending behind the ear coverts (and overall head pattern) and 4) reddish rump and uppertail coverts. I do not have so much experience with the winter plumages of this species, so I do not know for sure if this is a first-winter male or older male. One should also remember that old females get whiter median coverts, but somehow this looks like a male'. He suggested sending the images to other experts for further confirmation.

Arend Wassink replied (email dated 16 January 2019) that 'Indeed, it is a Yellow-breasted Bunting; apart from other characters, in these photos, the short primary projection with tertials hanging well over secondaries shows well! A very good record, certainly given the fact of the huge decrease in numbers. For instance, in Kazakhstan, where it was a common breeding and passage migrant in eastern and northern parts, there are now only a handful of records post 2000! As to the age, the bird is certainly not an adult male. Adult winter males have a cryptic plumage, with lots of pale fringes hiding the bright colours. Through wear, they acquire the summer plumage. That leaves us with adult female or second calendar-year male/female. Since I cannot see whether the bird has any streaking left of the juvenile plumage, on that character I cannot say much but what I see in the upper photo (with the bird looking to the right), it shows at least remnants of a lateral throat-stripe, which is a good character of a young (in this case second calendar-year)

bird. Therefore, I would call this bird a second calendar-year male/female'.

Thus, the identification was confirmed as a Yellow-breasted Bunting, and this was probably a second calendar-year individual. As stated by the author, it is an addition to the avifauna of Gujarat as it is not given in the Gujarat checklist (Ganpule 2016) or in the first update to the Gujarat checklist (Ganpule 2017). In fact, there are no records shown in the reference texts (Grimmett et al. 2011, Rasmussen & Anderton 2012) for western India. The only record from the western part of the Indian Subcontinent is of a bird collected from the Baluchistan coast, in Pakistan, in 1901 (Ticehurst 1927). Thus, this record from the western part of the Indian Subcontinent comes after more than 115 years. It is a very important record of this critically endangered species and shows that a few individuals may be straggling to western India. It could be overlooked in flocks of Red-headed Buntings and Black-headed Buntings. It is heartening to note this species in Gujarat and it is a record of great importance since the species is now so rare in many parts of its range.

We are extremely thankful to Arend Wassink and Jari Peltomäki for confirming the identification of this bird – Eds]

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