

Caught on camera in the field

AN OCCASIONAL SERIES OF IMAGES OF UNEXPECTED BIRDS IN UNUSUAL LOCATIONS

Indian Skimmer *Rynchops albicollis*: a recent record from Tamil Nadu

The globally Vulnerable Indian Skimmer *Rynchops albicollis* has suffered a rapid population decline caused by an increase in the human disturbance, exploitation and degradation of lowland rivers and lakes, its main habitat where it breeds in colonies on large, exposed sandbars and islands; it is also seen in estuaries and coastal areas in the non-breeding season.

The species is now mainly confined to South Asia, with most records today from the large river systems of the Indian subcontinent. The southernmost records from India are two from Tamil Nadu, one at Chennai (Madras) before 1845 and one at Pudukcheri (Pondicherry) in July 1932 (BirdLife International 2001).

On 11 April 2009, a sunny calm day, from 12h00–12h30 on a falling tide, we saw a single Indian Skimmer at Mudhaliarkuppam (12°15'14"N 80°00'22"E), Cheyur, Kanchipuram District, 98 km south of Chennai. The bird was seen on the shore along the backwaters about 4 km from the Tamil Nadu Tourist Development Corporation boathouse. It flew in with a group of Brown-headed Gulls *Larus brunnicephalus* in both summer and winter plumage, two Slender-billed Gulls *Larus genei*, and four Common Terns *Sterna*

hirundo. One Little Egret *Egretta garzetta* was also in the area before the group arrived. Digital images were made and sent to a few professional ornithologists for verification. This observation is the first in Tamil Nadu in modern times, and the second most southerly ever recorded.

Acknowledgements

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References

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N. Vikas Madhav and D. Nagarajan,
2 B Krishnaveni Apt., Plot No 9, Balakrishna Road, Valmiki Nagar,
Thiruvannamiyur, Chennai 600041, Tamil Nadu, India

Editors note: This image of Indian Skimmer was 'caught on camera' by probably our youngest ever contributor. Vikas was just nine years old when he found and photographed the bird.

Plate 1. Indian Skimmer *Rynchops albicollis* in company with Brown-headed Gull *Larus brunnicephalus*, Slender-billed Gull *Larus genei* and Common Tern *Sterna hirundo*, Mudhaliarkuppam, Cheyur, Kanchipuram District, Tamil Nadu, April 2009.



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Plates 2 & 3. Grey-necked Bunting *Emberiza buchanani* feeding in grasslands, Nirmalapura, Daluwa, Puttalam District, Kalpitiya Peninsula, Sri Lanka, December 2008.

The first record of Grey-necked Bunting *Emberiza buchanani* in Vietnam was pictured in *BirdingASIA* 11; two years later—almost to the day, the first record for Sri Lanka was caught on camera by members of the Field Ornithology Group of Sri Lanka (FOGSL).

Grey-necked Bunting *Emberiza buchanani*: first record for Sri Lanka

During a survey of bird populations in the Kalpitiya Peninsula, the Field Ornithology Group of Sri Lanka (FOGSL) research team were surveying coastal grassland at Nirmalapura, Daluwa, Puttalam District on 16 December 2008, when at around 07h00 one of us (CDK) noticed an unfamiliar bird. Its reddish beak and legs with streaky upperparts first caught our attention. The bird was rather bold and we were able to observe it at short range using binoculars and spotting scope for around two hours. A yellowish eye-ring and black moustachial stripe on the yellowish chin and throat were prominent characteristics: a combination unknown in any species previously recorded in Sri Lanka.

Based on the shape of its bill and other features, we suspected that the bird was a bunting. We obtained digiscope images and made detailed notes of the bird's features for comparison with descriptions in the field guide available to us (Grimmett *et al.* 1998). We concluded that the bird was a Grey-necked Bunting. The bird was subsequently observed at midday, when we photographed it extensively while it was feeding busily on grass seeds, and in the evening of the same day. During our observations the bird was solitary, although several other grassland and open area species were in the vicinity.

We sent several photographs of the bird to Dr Girish Jathar, a well-known Indian ornithologist for examination. He confirmed that the bird was a Grey-necked Bunting. According to Grimmett *et al.* (1998) the species is a summer visitor and passage migrant to Pakistan and winters mainly in Pakistan, central and west India. This is the first record of a Grey-necked Bunting, and the third bunting species, recorded in Sri Lanka. Black-headed Bunting *Emberiza melanocephala* and Red-headed Bunting *E. bruniceps* were recorded at Udawalawe National Park in January and February 2005 (Warakagoda 2005).



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C. D. Kaluthota, D. Samarasinghe, D. de Silva & H. de Silva,
Field Ornithology Group of Sri Lanka
Email: thechinthaka@gmail.com