

**BLACK FACED BUNTING *Emberiw spodocephala*
ON TALIABU ISLAND, SULA ISLAND GROUP;
THE FIRST RECORD FOR INDONESIA.**

by

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(Received 7 August 1995)

On the mid afternoon of 14 October 1991, we located an unfamiliar passerine feeding in an open grassy area in the centre of Menanga logging camp, on the north coast of Taliabu island. The bird was feeding, apparently in the company of a small flock of Yellow Wagtails *Motacilla flava* in rank grass and low vegetation. On several occasions it was seen to fly up into low bushes.

Due to the weather conditions at the time, (it had been an overcast day, with heavy, incessant rain) the bird was wet, and it was difficult to accurately determine plumage details. The following description is taken from field notes taken during the observation, and also from photographs of the bird taken by Nigel Bean.

Description:

A dull grey, "washed out" bunting, similar in size to the yellow wagtails present. In flight the bird appeared slim and long tailed. The brightest part of the bird were the sandy brown flight feathers. The flight feathers appeared worn and abraded, with no paler fringes to these feathers. Seemed to show some white in the outer tail feathers. This white was noticeable when the bird was alighting, for example, in the tops of low bushes, but was very difficult to see when it was facing directly away.

Head: although it was difficult to determine the extent of any head pattern, the bird did appear to show a grey "shawl type" effect, contrasting with the brown mantle. The face pattern was undisguised, with no supercilium, no obvious malar pattern and no obvious eyering.

Upperparts: mantle a grey brown colour with no obvious rufous tones. The rump appeared grey brown, with no warm rufous tones and was concolourous with the tail and mantle.

Underparts: overall grey white with some flank streaking. Upper breast more heavily streaked grey. Upper belly off white, with heavy black streaking. The bill of the bird appeared conical, rather than the slimmer bill of an insectivorous species, and appeared large in proportion to the head (however this effect may have seemed accentuated due to the bedraggled state of the individual).

Bare parts: bill and legs pale straw.

The call was heard on one occasion when flying over, a single "chup" note.

The bird was present in the same area on the following morning. By now the bird had dried out, but there were no major differences in plumage colouration as had been noted on the previous day. We left to carry out field work and the bird was not present later in the day. On our return to the UK the photographs were circulated to various ornithologists including Urban Olsson who felt sure that the bird was a male Black faced Bunting *Emberiza spodocephala*.

The breeding distribution of Black faced Bunting ranges in Asia from central and southern Siberia, south to north east and central China, north Korea, northern Japan (to central Honshu) and the south Kuril islands. The species migrates in a southerly and south westerly direction to reach the wintering grounds, and winters south to the eastern Himalayas, central India, northern Burma, northern Indochina, south central China, Taiwan and the Ryukyu Islands, Japan (Sibley & Monroe 1990). The individual present on Taliabu was south of its normal wintering area. Six examples of what are thought to be genuine cases of longdistance vagrancy in this species have occurred in the Western Palearctic (Hough 1994). In view of this species being so unusually far south of its normal range, the possibility of ship assisted vagrancy or of escaped cagebird origin cannot be discounted.

Acknowledgements:

Thanks are due to Clive Byers and Urban Olsson for their assistance in identification, to Dick Filby for providing access to reference material and to Guy Kirwan for providing additional information.

References:

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