

A WINTER RECORD OF A LITTLE BUNTING FROM INTERIOR OREGON

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On 28 January 2013 we were birding in central Willowa County, extreme north-eastern Oregon. Late in the afternoon we entered the town of Joseph in order to check the town's feeders a second time that day. There was 3–4 inches of snow on the ground and birds were concentrated. As we checked one feeder from the car, Contreras noticed a sparrow-like bird in a tree and was astonished to see a Little Bunting (*Emberiza pusilla*), a species he had seen only once before, at Gambell, Alaska. Tumer agreed with the identification and got out of the car and obtained several diagnostic photos, the best of which is Figure 1.

Kyle Bratcher relocated the bunting later that day in an area of dense, leafless shrubbery near an active feeder, but it quickly disappeared. Trent Bray subsequently found the bird about a block away and obtained additional photos (see *Oregon Birds* 39[1]:3, 2013), and eventually Kendrick Moholt joined the four of us for reasonable views of the bird in dense shrubbery, where we obtained a few additional photos. The bunting was reported by a few observers, and missed by many others, during the following two days, but it was not found again thereafter until 23 March, when relocated by Adrian and Christopher Hinkle. It was still skittish, but a few people saw it through 25 March 2013, when it was last reported.

This is the first record of the Little Bunting for Oregon and, to our knowledge, the first winter record and the first noncoastal record in North America. We made no major effort to age or sex the bird, as this is difficult to do in the field, and our photos show insufficient detail.

The Little Bunting was first documented in North America on 6 September 1970 when one was found on a U.S. Coast Guard icebreaker in the Chukchi Sea, approximately 150 miles off Icy Cape, Alaska (Watson et al. 1974). It now occurs casually but almost annually in fall in northwestern Alaska, with most reports at Gambell, St. Lawrence Island, between late August and early October (Howell et al. in press). A high count of 10 individuals was reported there in autumn 2007 (*N. Am. Birds* 62:134, 2008). This species remains exceptionally rare elsewhere in western Alaska, where known in the Pribilof and Aleutian islands. There is only one spring record, of a single bird at Gambell 2–4 June 2008 (Rademaker and Powell 2010).

The first North American record south of Alaska was of one photographed at Point Loma, San Diego County, California, 21–24 October 1991 (McCaskie 1993). Since then, single individuals have been found at Southeast Farallon Island, California, 27–28 September 2002 (Cole and McCaskie 2004) and 14 November 2012 (www.californiabirds.org), and at Rancho San Jose de Castro, Baja California Sur, Mexico, 8 October 2008 (Rademaker and Powell 2010). The date of 14 November represents the latest seasonal record for North America.

The Little Bunting breeds widely across northern Eurasia, from northeastern Fennoscandia (Byers et al. 1995, Svensson et al. 2009) east across northern Russia to Anadyrland in the Russian Far East (Flint et al. 1984, Gibson and Byrd 2007, Brazil 2009). Migration is primarily through the eastern half of Asia, but a few vagrants reach western Europe and Iceland annually (Lewington et al. 1991, Howell et al. in press). The Little Bunting is a rare migrant offshore in Japan (Shimba 2007, Brazil 2009) and a vagrant to Wrangel Island (Portenko 1973), which lies at the western edge of the Chukchi Sea, north of the species' breeding range in the Russian Far East.

NOTES



Figure 1. Little Bunting, Joseph, Wallowa Co., Oregon, 28 January 2013.

Photo by Craig Tumer

Wintering is mainly from Nepal and northeast India across central Asia and southern Siberia to central coastal China and southern Taiwan (Byers et al. 1995, Brazil 2009); small numbers winter in Japan (Shimba 2007). Flint et al. (1984) reported the Little Bunting to prefer montane and nearby areas in winter. The Oregon record is therefore slightly farther north than the species normally winters, although perhaps in typical semi-montane habitat, as Joseph lies at an elevation of 4190 ft at the base of the 9900-ft Wallowa Mountains.

It is worth noting that the western breeding population of this species makes a long eastward movement in fall, moving from Fennoscandia and northwestern Russia to eastern Siberia before turning southeast (Byers et al. 1995), a pattern roughly analogous to that of the westernmost Gray-cheeked Thrushes (*Catharus minimus*), which breed on the Chukchi Peninsula (Portenko 1973) and migrate primarily east across northwestern North America before turning south or southeast east of the Rockies (American Ornithologists' Union 1998). The populations of the Little Bunting breeding in eastern Russia apparently do not follow such a pattern in fall, although they are much closer to North America and the probable source of records at Gambell as early in fall as late August, an established pattern of occurrence (Lehman 2005). The immediate source of a particular vagrant is, of course, speculative.

NOTES

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