

First winter record of Little Bunting (*Emberiza pusilla*) in Morocco

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Disponible en ligne (Available online) : 19 November 2016

The Little Bunting (*Emberiza pusilla*) has an extremely large breeding range, covering the subarctic and cooler boreal zone from East Fennoscandia to East Siberia, with Europe accounting for less than half of its global population (Hagemeijer & Blair 1997, Birdlife International 2015). It breeds on mossy or swampy ground in shrubby tundra and in the northern taiga (Hagemeijer & Blair 1997). The Little Bunting regularly winters in South China, Northeast India, Bhutan, Bangladesh, Laos, Myanmar, North Thailand, Vietnam and Taiwan. In winter, it favours open and semi-open habitats, crop fields, stubble and paddy fields, edges of roads, areas of bushes near marshes, and visits gardens and orchards. The autumn migration begins late July and the majority of buntings have left their breeding grounds by mid-September. The spring movements are from March to early May. Western birds head east from breeding grounds then south or south-east, and eastern birds head south, to reach winter quarters via Mongolia, south-east Russia, and north-east China (Copete 2016).

The Little Bunting is a vagrant to most European countries, particularly in autumn (Birdlife international 2015). For example, almost 1000 Little Buntings were recorded in the British Isles and 139 in France during 1958–2011 (De Juana & Garcia 2015). Sporadic, but almost each year winter records of Little Bunting on west coast of Europe indicate its scarce wintering in this region (Jara *et al.* 2010, De Juana & Garcia 2015). For instance, the first Iberian record was a Little Bunting captured near Málaga on 28 December 1874 (Arévalo 1887) and three birds together were seen at the Miño estuary in February 2009 (Dies *et al.* 2011). In the last years, sightings of Little Bunting were recorded almost every late autumn and winter in the Canary islands (Sagardía 2012, Ramírez *et al.* 2013, Sagardía & Matutes 2014, Martínez *et al.* 2016).

In western North Africa, there are two unconfirmed sightings in Mauretania (Isenmann *et al.* 2010), one in Algeria (Isenman & Moali 2000) and three unconfirmed and one validated records in Morocco (Ramírez *et al.* 2013).

Moroccan unvalidated sightings include a bird observed near Agadir on 21 October 1994 (Bergier *et al.* 2000a), another at the Massa estuary on 4 April 1995 (Thévenot *et al.* 2003) and one at the mouth of Oued Draa on 22 October 1998 (Bergier *et al.* 2000b). There is a single confirmed record of a first year bird ringed on 9 October 2013 in the Souss-Massa National Park, two kilometres upstream from the mouth of the river (Ramírez *et al.* 2013). No winter occurrence of Little Bunting was documented in Morocco to 2016.

On 28 February 2016, one Little Bunting was recorded at 14:50 (UTC) in Tiznit urban park, Jardin 3 Mars (coordinates 29°41'38.20"N 9°43'29.32"W) in southern Morocco. The bird was observed by the Czech ornithologist Libor Praus for over 15 minutes. It was foraging on the ground under ornamental plantings together with a flock of Common Bulbul *Pycnonotus barbatus*. A picture was taken to confirm this record (Fig. 1).

The species like Little Bunting should be looked over in western North Africa during migration and wintering. The number of records could increase with more coverage given to wetlands, oases and larger urban parks. However, given the scarcity of records along the west coast of Europe and Africa, it is not a species that is regularly encountered, and should be properly documented if found again in the future.



Fig. 1. Little Bunting *Emberiza pusilla* in Tiznit urban park, Jardin 3 Mars, Morocco on 28 February 2016. Photo © Libor Praus

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