

The first confirmed record of Little Bunting *Emberiza pusilla* in Morocco

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The Little Bunting *Emberiza pusilla* inhabits a wide belt stretching from North-East Norway to the Russian Far East and the Pacific. It winters in North India, Myanmar, North Thailand, Indochina and South China.

It breeds in moist open taiga, partly flooded forests and more open tundra. 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.

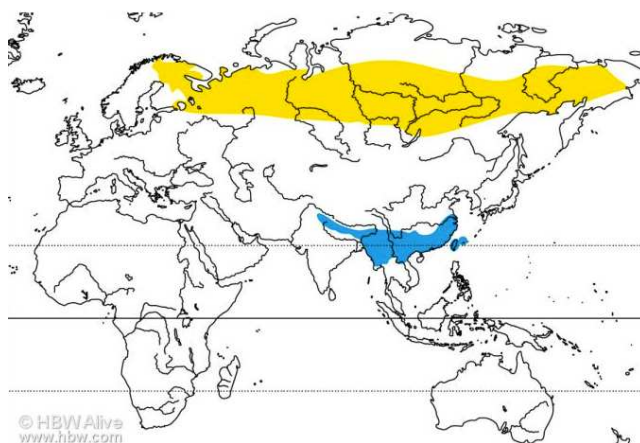
The autumn migration begins late July and the majority of birds have left their breeding grounds by mid-September. The spring movements are from March to early May (HBW alive accessed 23 October 2013).

The Little Bunting is a vagrant to most European and Middle East countries (BirdLife International 2012). In South Western Europe, there are 47 records (49 birds) in mainland Spain and Balearic Islands (Gutiérrez *et al.* 2012; most are from October to January – De Juana 2006) and five in Portugal (Jara *et al.* 2010) up to 2010.

There are two records on the Canary Islands (Fuerteventura – Ramos 2008 ; Lanzarote – García-del-Rey & García 2013), possibly an old one in Algeria (Heim de Balsac & Mayaud 1962, Isenmann & Moali 2000), and two unproven records at Nouakchott in Mauritania (Isenmann *et al.* 2010).

In Morocco, there are three unconfirmed sightings: a bird 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). Nevertheless, none of these records were substantiated enough to be validated.

On 9 October 2013, during a ringing session run by the Project CLIMATIQUE – POCTEFEX, a Little Bunting was caught at 8:30 (UTC) in the Souss-Massa National Park, two kilometres upstream from the mouth of the river. The nets were installed on the shore of the river and were surrounded by reeds (*Phragmites sp.*), some *Tamarix sp.* and *Pistacia atlantica*. The bird was immediately identified as a Little Bunting though critical features were checked with the support of bibliography, e.g. the reddish pattern of cheeks and lores and the beige spot after the cheeks. The wing length was 68 mm (64-74 mm for *E. pusilla*, Svensson 1996) and did not overlap with another similar species, the Rustic Bunting *Emberiza rustica* (71-83 mm, Svensson 1996). The bird was aged as a first year (EURING Age 3) by the primaries and the shape of the tail feathers, but was not sexed.



Other data obtained were tail length, bill, tarsus, fat score, muscle and weight. Pictures were taken before releasing.

This is the first confirmed record of Little Bunting for Morocco.

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