

FIRST RECORD OF RED-HEADED BUNTING *EMBERIZA BRUNICEPS* IN BANGLADESH

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On 17 December 2023 afternoon, Md. Nasimuzzaman and I went to Beel Bhala near Gohomabona (24.3779489, 88.4766235) village at about 12 km away from Rajshahi City for bird watching and later Nazmul Kamal Rony joined with us. It was 3.56 pm, we saw three birds were sitting on the overhead electric wire above the harvested paddy-field of which two individuals of Asian Green Bee-eater and the remaining one was unknown to us. We carefully took photographs of the unknown bird which we followed until it had moved down to the nearby harvested paddy-field. Later we identified the unknown bird as a male Red-headed Bunting *Emberiza bruniceps* (Figs. 1–2) by comparing the characteristics as described in the field guide of the Birds of the Indian Subcontinent (Grimmett *et al.* 2011). The bird was observed there till 22 December 2023 and several bird watchers eventually observed the bird in the same location.

The male Red-headed Bunting could be easily identified by its short and conical bill. Male has rufous on head and yellowish-green mantle. Female may show rufous on head and breast, and yellowish to crown and mantle. Female almost identical to Black-headed Bunting, but indicative features include paler throat than breast (Grimmett *et al.* 2011). The bird exhibited a distinctive bunting profile. In Bangladesh, recorded bunting species included Little Bunting *E. pusilla*, Chestnut-eared Bunting *E. fucata*, Yellow-breasted Bunting *E. aureola*, and Black-faced Bunting *E. spodocephala* are reported (Rashid 1967, Husain 1979, Khan 1982, Harvey 1990, Thompson *et al.* 1993, Grimmett *et al.* 1998, IUCN Bangladesh 2000, Thompson & Johnson 2003, Khan 2008, Siddiqui *et al.* 2008). The Red-headed Bunting and non-breeding, female plumages of Black-headed Bunting are almost identical and therefore very difficult to separate these two species (Byers *et al.* 1995), but identification of adult male is relatively straightforward due to distinctive breeding plumage of a male Red-headed Bunting. Here, we confirmed the first record of Red-headed Bunting in Bangladesh. In Nepal, a male of the Red-headed Bunting was first spotted at the Narayani River of Chitwan National Park on 15 April 1975 (Fleming Sr. *et al.* 1979, Gurung 1983). After that on 18 February 2002 an adult

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Fig. 1. Red-headed Bunting on electric wire. Fig. 2. Red-headed Bunting on harvested paddy-field.

male was seen in a flock of about 50 buntings in Koshi Tappu Wildlife Reserve (Tebb *et al.* 2002, Inskipp 2004, Tebb *et al.* 2004). Later a pair was recorded near the Koshi Tappu Wildlife Reserve on February 2002 (Giri and Choudhary 2002).

We recorded the bird in a cultivated paddy-field near a water body. The habitats of Red-headed Bunting are steppes with bushes, river valleys, semi-desert areas, and cultivated areas near water and irrigation channels, gardens and groves, forests, and thickets of tall grasses. It inhabits at both plains and mountains with altitudes of about 3000 m during breeding season (Copete, 2020).

The Red-headed Bunting is a winter visitor in India and adjacent areas including Nepal and Sri Lanka. Grimmett *et al.* (1998) stated that it was found in Gujrat, southern Rajasthan, western Madhya Pradesh and south to northern Karnataka and north-west Andhra Pradesh of India. Rashid (1967) mentions the species as a winter visitor to the north-western and western districts of Bangladesh which is supported by our findings. The Red-headed Bunting breeds in the lower Ural River of southern Altai Mountains, western Xinjiang and north-eastern Iran (Byers *et al.* 1995) and Korelov *et al.* (1974) reported the species breeds in Kazakhstan.

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(Manuscript received on 17 March 2026 revised on 25 April 2026)