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Yellow-browed Bunting in Poland in October 2014

On 5 October 2014 at c 09:00, an unusual bunting *Emberiza* was trapped at ringing station 'Bukowo' of the Operation Baltic (organised by the Bird Migration Research Station, University of Gdańsk) near Dąbkowice, West Pomerania, Poland (54°20'15"N, 16°14'40"E). It was found in a mist-net placed in broad-leaf shrub on the edge of forest and grey dunes. After a brief study of accessible literature (Svensson 1992, Svensson et al 2009), it was identified as Yellow-browed Bunting *E chrysophrys*. After ringing, measuring, collecting a blood sample and taking photographs, the bird was released. It was not seen again.

Description

SIZE & SHAPE As Common Reed Bunting *E schoeniclus*. Bill typical for bunting: solid, triangular and with high base and pointed tip.

HEAD Broad white supercilium turning to yellow above eye and to bill; on back of head, reaching grey-brown neck, surrounding brown ear-coverts with blackish edges. Small white auricular spot. Paler buffish curve below eye. Crown dark with prominent white median crown-stripe. Malar stripe dark.

UPPERPARTS Mantle pattern resembling Dunnock

Prunella modularis, with broad blackish streaks over grey-buff background, becoming weaker towards brownish uppertail-coverts. Centre of back rusty with dark streaks.

UNDERPARTS White with dense blackish streaking on breast and flank.

WING Wing-coverts grey-buff. Median coverts with white tip; greater coverts with pale buff edges. Tertiaries similar to Common Reed Bunting, with dark centre and broad rusty edges; outer web showing typical pattern of most Eurasian *Emberiza* buntings, with rusty edge strongly widening, creating rusty wedge into dark feather centre. Primaries and secondaries narrowly edged rusty-buff, becoming more yellowish towards distal part of wing.

TAIL Rectrices blackish-brown except for (moulted on both sides) innermost buffish feather (t1); two outermost feathers (t5-6) showing white, similar to Common Reed Bunting.

BARE PARTS Lower mandible and base part of upper mandible pinkish. Rest of bill dark grey. Iris dull-grey. Leg pinkish.

BIOMETRY Measurements taken according to Busse (2000) and Svensson (1992). Wing length 75 mm. Tail length 64 mm. Tarsus length (measured with ruler) 20 mm. Wing formula (primaries numbered from outside): p3=p4 (wing tip), p2 2 mm shorter, p5 1 mm, p6 4 mm, p7 9 mm and p8 13 mm shorter. Outer web of p3-6 emarginated. Fat score 2 (cf Busse 2000).

TABLE 1 Diagnostic characters of Yellow-browed *Emberiza chrysophrys*, Rustic *E rustica*, Little *E pusilla* and Common Reed Bunting *E schoeniclus* in immature/female plumage / diagnostische kenmerken van Geelbrauwgors *Emberiza chrysophrys*, Bosgors *E rustica*, Dwerggors *E pusilla* en Rietgors *E schoeniclus* in onvolwassen kleeft of vrouwtjeskleeft

	Yellow-browed Bunting	Rustic Bunting	Little Bunting	Common Reed Bunting
side of head	broad yellow supercilium, yellow mainly in frontal part, no eye-ring	off-white to white supercilium, brownish to blackish cheek, no eye-ring	brown with black hind and lower edge, white eye-ring	buff supercilium, brown-grey or rusty cheek
crown	dark with white median crown-stripe	buffish to blackish with narrow, pale median crown-stripe	dark with rusty median crown-stripe	grey-brown, paler in centre
whitish auricular spot	present	present	present	absent
bill	pinkish, mainly on base of mandible	pinkish, mainly on mandible	grey	grey
wing-bars	whitish or pale buff	whitish	whitish, often indistinct	yellow-buff
uppertail-coverts	rusty-buff	rusty-buff	greyish	greyish or Brownish
mantle	grey-buff with rusty center	brown-buff	greyish	grey-buff
underparts streaking	blackish	rusty	blackish	dark buff
leg	pinkish	pink-brown	pink	brown-grey



001-002 Yellow-browed Bunting / Geelbrauwgors *Emberiza chrysophrys*, first-year female, Dąbkowice village, West Pomeranian Province, Poland, 5 October 2014 (*Michał Polakowski*)



Identification

Yellow-browed Bunting is distinctive but may be confused with some other Palearctic bunting species: Rustic *E rustica*, Little *E pusilla* and Common Reed Bunting. Characteristic features are the pattern of the head, mantle and underparts (cf Svensson 1992, Byers et al 1995, Svensson et al 2009, van Duivendijk 2010). The most prominent features are listed in table 1. Superficially, Yellow-browed could also be confused with some Nearctic sparrows, such as White-throated Sparrow *Zonotrichia albicollis*, which shows a similar but much 'cleaner' head pattern (cf Byers et al 1995).

The wing length of 75 mm may suggest a female but just falls in the overlap between male and female (males 75-84 mm, females 70-78 mm; cf Svensson 1992, Cramp & Perrins 1994); tail length of 64 mm may even suggest a male. However, the DNA study conducted on a blood sample taken from the trapped bird using PCR method with P2/P8 primers (Griffiths et al 1998) allowed to identify the bird as a female. Based on the iris colour together with the worn, pointed rectrices (except for the moulted innermost pair) and not fully ossified skull (the border was visible on the lower part of an occiput), the bird was aged a first calendar-year (cf Svensson 1992).

Distribution and previous WP records

Yellow-browed Bunting breeds in south-eastern Siberia, Russia, from Irkutsk to the Barguzin river and the Stanovoy mountain range. It winters in central and south-eastern China (Cramp & Perrins 1994). It is a rare vagrant to the Western Palearctic (WP), with only nine previous records, of which five in Britain and singles in Belgium, France, the Netherlands and Sweden (table 2). Seven records were in autumn, one was in spring and one was in winter. A report in Ukraine in January 1983 (cf Davydovich & Gorban 1990) is currently considered insufficiently documented (Geert Groot Koerkamp in litt; cf Haas 2012) and a German record from April 2004 was classified as Category D/E (Deutsche Seltenheitenkommission 2008). The bird, therefore, concerns the first for Poland and 10th for the WP. The record has been accepted by the Polish rarities committee (Komisja Faunistyczna 2015).

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TABLE 2 Records of Yellow-browed Bunting *Emberiza chrysophrys* in the Western Palearctic / gevallen van Geelbrauwgors *Emberiza chrysophrys* in het West-Palearticse gebied (cf De Smet 1996, Haas 2010; Marcel Haas in litt)

<i>Belgium (1)</i> 20 October 1966, Tongeren, Limburg, first-winter male, trapped (kept in captivity until winter 1969/70 when it died; skin lost) (De Smet 1996, De Smet et al 1996, Dufourny 1997)	<i>France (1)</i> autumn 1827, Lille, Nord, first-winter male, trapped, collected (Jiguet 2007, Jiguet et al 2007)
<i>Britain (5)</i> 19 October 1975, Holkham Meads, Norfolk, England, immature/female (Rogers & Rarities Committee 1989, Holman 1990, British Ornithologists' Union 1991) 12-23 October 1980, Fair Isle, Shetland, Scotland, male, ringed on 12 October (Rogers & Rarities Committee 1982, Kitson & Robertson 1983, British Ornithologists' Union 1984) 22-23 September 1992, North Ronaldsay, Orkney, Scotland (Donnelly 1993, Rogers & Rarities Committee 1993) 19-22 October 1994, St Agnes, Scilly, England (Wright 1994, Rogers & Rarities Committee 1995) 4-5 May 1998, Hoy, Orkney, Scotland (Rogers & Rarities Committee 1999)	<i>Netherlands (1)</i> 19 October 1982, Schiermonnikoog, Friesland, first-winter male, ringed (Scharringa & Winkelman 1984, Blankert et al 1987, Vonk & van IJzendoorn 1988, van den Berg & Bosman 2001)
	<i>Poland (1)</i> 5 October 2014, Dąbkowice, West Pomeranian Province, first-winter female, ringed (this paper)
	<i>Sweden (1)</i> 3 January to 27 February 2009, Matningen, Säbysjön, Uppland, male (www.sofnet.org/sveriges-ornitologiska-forening/raritetskatalogen/sparvar-finkar-faltsparvar/gulbrynad-sparv)

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