

Gosling's Buntings *Emberiza goslingi* in northwest Kenya: a new species for East Africa

The discovery of the River Prinia *Prinia fluviatilis* at Lokichogio (also spelled Lokichokio) by Finch (2005) raised the possibility that other Sahelian species might exist undetected in northwest Kenya. On 2 May 2022, the authors, Peter Steward, Jaap Gijbetsen and Angela Waki were birding on a small rocky hill near Lokichogio, alongside the road to Nadapal in the southern foothills of the Mogila Range (4°17'10" N, 34°18'40" E), when we found a pair of Gosling's Buntings *Emberiza goslingi*. The site was sheltered from the wind, light conditions were good but not too bright, and the area had recently received rain. We obtained prolonged views permitting photographs to be taken, and here we provide documentation in support of the first East Africa record of this more typically West African species.

Description

We observed both a male and a female on the hillside. The male (Fig. 1; left) showed a typical, bold head pattern, marked by four white stripes over the otherwise dark crown and sides of the face. The upper mandible of the bill was dark brown but was not immediately obvious in the field, with the lower mandible a golden-yellow. The eyes appeared black in the field and the lower eyelids were white, while the white supercilium and cheek (malar) stripes were slightly broader than those of Cinnamon-breasted Bunting *Emberiza tahapisi*. The chin, throat, upper breast, nape and sides of the neck were a plain cold grey, and the throat itself showed no suggestion of black or dark mottling, all unlike *E. tahapisi* which is black-throated. There was a fine dark mark under the white malar stripe which is typical of Gosling's Bunting and quite unlike the dark spots seen in taxon *septemstriata*, which is widely treated as a subspecies of *E. tahapisi*. The remainder of the underparts were cinnamon-buff on the mid- to lower breast becoming brighter cinnamon-rufous on the lower belly and flanks, with the vent a paler whitish-buff. On inspection of the wing, the alula was dark, while the lesser coverts were obscured by the scapular feathers. The median coverts were cinnamon-rufous with jet-black centers, while the greater coverts were similar but with centers slightly paler, being dark brown not black. The tertials showed a similar pattern and appearance to the greater coverts but the secondaries were edged rufous with the tips showing darker centres thus forming a rufous panel in the closed wing. The upper side of the tail was dark with cinnamon-rufous edges. The legs were pale pinkish.

The female (Fig. 1; right) was somewhat similar to the male in pattern but paler overall and showing less contrast throughout. The grey on the throat was paler; an almost dirty, yellow-brown, while also being less distinct on the collar with only faint dark brown streaking. Dark areas of the head were dusky-brown instead of black, and pale parts of face were buffy white vs. white. The underparts were buffy cinnamon throughout, and slightly paler than on the male. Meanwhile, the light brown of the upperparts and scapulars were greyer and less warm-toned than in the male, and the streaking on the mantle more extensive leading to almost no contrast between the mantle and the coverts. The edges to the greater coverts were a narrow pale-buff, but the median coverts had very broad bright rufous edges. The lesser coverts and primary coverts were not visible, but the alula appeared entirely cinnamon-rufous.

The secondaries were barely visible, but the primaries showed bright rufous edging similar to the male. The feet and bill were similar to those of the male.

The birds were in general shy than other “rock buntings” that we have observed and were quick to hide behind small rocks, vegetation and stones. When disturbed they moved surreptitiously between plants but settled less than 30m away. The male raised its head and came out of cover upon playback of *E. tahapisi* call (the call of Gosling’s Bunting was not available to us at the time) but did not call or sing in response. The female was not as shy when observed subsequently.



Figure 1. Images of male (left; V. Ikawa) and presumed female (right; A. Hinkle) Gosling’s Buntings *Emberiza goslingi* at Lokichogio, northwest Kenya, on 2 May 2022.

Discussion

We compared various adult Gosling’s Bunting images from across the known range, and an example from Ghana (Fig. 2; right) appears almost identical to the Lokichogio male (Fig. 2; left). However, the Kenya bird shows a marginally paler grey throat and cinnamon breast. Compared with a female from Burkina Faso (Fig. 3; right), the Lokichogio female is also marginally paler (Fig. 3; left).

Having recently seen *E. tahapisi* 50 km south of Lokichogio on the same trip, we were also able to compare the habitats used by each across a small area and time window. While we found the *E. tahapisi* in an area with lush vegetation, steeper rocks and larger boulders, we found the *E. goslingi* in a drier area with less vegetation, only short grass, smaller stones and overall, more xeric conditions. In fact, the habitat was very similar to that favoured by *goslingi* in West Africa.



Figure 2. Images of male Gosling’s Bunting *E. goslingi* at Lokichogio on 2 May 2022 (left; V. Ikawa) and in Ghana (right; ML205094411 © D. Shapiro).



Figure 3. Images of presumed female Gosling's Buntings *E. goslingi* at Lokichogio (left; A. Hinkle) and in Burkina Faso (right; ML205149991 © J. del Hoyo).

For East Africa, neither Stevenson & Fanshawe (2020), Lewis & Pomeroy (1989), Britton (1980) nor Zimmerman *et al.* (1996) make mention of Gosling's Bunting or even the form *septemstriata* in the region; they only reference the nominate subspecies of *E. tahapisi*. Further afield, Nikolaus (1989) noted "fairly common and always associated with rocky hills, grass and bushes ... *goslingi* in the west around the Boro/Riki River; nominate [*tahapisi*] along the southern border from Zande [east] to Boma [Hills]; and *septemstriata* east of the Nile south to the Sobat River." Ash & Atkins (2009) and Redman *et al.* (2016) also treat birds in southern Ethiopia as nominate *tahapisi*, restricting *septemstriata* to northern Ethiopia and Eritrea. Fry & Keith (2004) likewise state that *septemstriata* is present in South Sudan and Sudan east of the Nile but to the north of South Sudan, with that population continuous with the one in northern Ethiopia and Eritrea, and approximately 900 km north of Lokichogio.

Our record therefore comprises a first known occurrence of Gosling's Bunting in East Africa and has been accepted as such by the East Africa Rarities Committee (N. Hunter, pers. comm.).

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