

areas since the 1980s, and also to the increase of discarded fish from trawlers, particularly around the Ebro Delta (Gutiérrez & Guinart 2008, BirdLife International 2014). In winter the species is more widespread around the Mediterranean Basin and also winters commonly in north-west Africa, with 2% of the population wintering in Senegambia (Olsen & Larsson 2004). The record reported here appears to be the first south of The Gambia (Olsen & Larsson 2004; R. J. Dowsett *in litt.* 2014).

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## First record of Ortolan Bunting *Emberiza hortulana* for southern Africa, in Namibia

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**Première observation du Bruant ortolan *Emberiza hortulana* en Afrique australe.** Un Bruant ortolan *Emberiza hortulana* de premier hiver, probablement une femelle, a été photographié dans la NamibRand Nature Reserve, Namibie centrale, le 13 novembre 2013. C'est la première observation pour l'Afrique australe, faite à environ 2.500 km au sud de la donnée précédente la plus méridionale.

On 13 November 2013 at 09.20 hrs, an Ortolan Bunting *Emberiza hortulana* alighted on the verandah of the NamibRand Family Hideout in NamibRand Nature Reserve, central Namibia (25°17'13.2"S 16°04'04.8"E). It was present for *c.*10 seconds in the shade of the low wall surrounding the verandah, during which time I secured two photographs (Figs. 1–2), before it took off, giving a single mellow *chew* call in flight. It appeared to land in the short dry grass just beyond the property's low boundary wall, *c.*10 m away, but I was unable to relocate it that day or the next. It may have been attracted by food I had put out for Sociable Weavers *Philetairus socius* and Scaly-feathered Finches *Sporopipes squamifrons*,

but was not seen to associate with these and was some metres from where they were feeding.

### Identification

Although I was unable to take field notes of the bird's plumage during its very brief appearance, the photographs clearly show a number of distinctive features. Most striking are the prominent and distinctly yellowish submoustachial stripe and throat, contrasting with the blackish malar stripe, the numerous sharply demarcated blackish streaks on the breast and flanks, the broad pale tips to the lesser and greater covers forming two prominent white wingbars, the whitish eyering and the conical pinkish bill. The heavily



**Figures 1–2.** First-winter Ortolan Bunting *Emberiza hortulana*, NamibRand Family Hideout, NamibRand Nature Reserve, Namibia, 13 November 2013 (Paul F. Donald)

Bruant ortolan *Emberiza hortulana* de premier hiver, NamibRand Family Hideout, NamibRand Nature Reserve, Namibie, 13 novembre 2013 (Paul F. Donald)

streaked breast and flanks eliminate all of the resident southern African buntings, and the prominent submoustachial and malar stripes, and eye-ring, clearly place the bird in the species group comprising Ortolan, Cretzschmar's *E. caesia*, Cinereous *E. cineracea* and Grey-necked Buntings *E. buchanani* (Byers *et al.* 1995, Madge 2011). Moreover, the heavily streaked breast and flanks, and prominent whitish wingbars identify it as an immature of one of these species. The pink bill and prominent blackish malar stripe exclude Cinereous Bunting, which has a grey bill and lacks a prominent malar at all ages, while the heavily streaked underparts and yellowish throat also exclude Grey-necked Bunting, which is virtually uniform below (Byers *et al.* 1995). Separation of immature Ortolan and

Cretzschmar's Buntings is often problematic, but the distinctly yellow, rather than buff or orange, submoustachial stripe and throat contrasting with a prominent blackish malar stripe, the whitish, rather than buffy, wingbars and the extensive and clearly demarcated blackish breast and flank streaks all indicate an immature Ortolan Bunting (Byers *et al.* 1995). Unlike most buntings, juvenile Ortolans moult into a first-winter plumage that is distinctive from later plumages (Byers *et al.* 1995). The reduced streaking on the upperparts, the extensively streaked flanks and the fairly fresh appearance to the wing-coverts all indicate a first-winter bird yet to commence partial moult, which is usually initiated on arrival in the wintering grounds, and which leads to the more adult-like first-summer plumage. Although

there is much individual variation and the sexes cannot be reliably separated in the field, the heavy flank streaks are suggestive of a female (Byers *et al.* 1995). On photographic evidence, this was therefore a recently moulted first-winter, probably female, Ortolan Bunting. This is a poorly known and rarely photographed plumage in Africa.

Recordings on xeno-canto, such as that by V. Arnold (<http://www.xeno-canto.org/139755>), suggest that the single call heard was at the lower end of the pitch of, but well within, the wide range of calls given by this species on migration.

### Distribution in Africa

This is the first record of Ortolan Bunting in southern Africa, and indeed one of very few records south of the equator. Although the species' non-breeding range in Africa is poorly known, the distribution of recent records suggests that it inhabits a fairly narrow zone (07–10°N) of sub-Saharan Sahel and Guinea savanna between Senegambia in the west and Ethiopia and Eritrea in the east, with possible wintering populations in Oman and Yemen (Bairlein *et al.* 2009). No large non-breeding aggregations are known, and it appears that the species is thinly distributed across this wide longitudinal range, with most wintering birds recorded in upland areas. Sub-equatorial records include several records from the Ngulia Hills (Tsavo) and Taita Hills, in southern Kenya just south of the equator, four records from Seychelles and a single poorly documented record from Goma, north-eastern DR Congo (c.01°06'S) (Fry & Keith 2004, Bairlein *et al.* 2009, Safford & Hawkins 2013). The Namibian record was therefore c.24 degrees of latitude, or c.2,500 km, south of the previous southernmost record, and an extraordinary instance of vagrancy. The species' appearance in southern Africa appears particularly surprising given that its breeding population in Europe is at an all-time low following decades of severe decline (Bairlein *et al.* 2009). However, the date of the record and the fact that the bird was in first-winter plumage are both consistent with natural vagrancy. The species' appearance

on Seychelles indicates that migrants are capable of sustained non-stop flight that could carry them over natural barriers or large expanses of unsuitable habitat. Furthermore, the remoteness of the location, the very low number of aviculturists in the region and the distance from the nearest major port all make it highly unlikely that the bird escaped from a collection or initially arrived in southern Africa on board a ship.

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