First record of Rock Bunting Emberiza cia in Saudi Arabia

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WHILE conducting coastal survey work on 25 May 1991 at Ras Abu Murikha (just north of Ras Tannura, eastern Saudi Arabia), as part of the NCWCD/BirdLife International wader study in the Arabian Gulf, a medium-sized bunting was noted foraging secretively amongst the coastal dune grasses. The bird was identified as a male Rock Bunting Emberiza cia.

The most striking feature of the bird was a greyish-white and black-striped head. Closer views showed that it had an all-grey bill; throat, sides of neck, and upper breast were grey with no trace of streaks or speckles; rest of underparts, as well as the rump, rufous. Upperparts contrasted with the underparts because of heavy dark streaking, which extended onto the centre of the crown. The tail was brown, with distinct white outer feathers. Legs were flesh-coloured, and the only call heard was a short, sharp 'tssp', delivered in flight. In particular, the colour of bill, throat, and outer tail feathers allowed separation from the Middle Eastern race of House Bunting Emberiza cia striolata striolata.

The bird, which was relatively tame and fed actively, was observed for about 45 minutes at the same location. It was not found there again during a visit on the following day.

The only records of Rock Bunting from Arabia that I am aware of are two from Kuwait, of single birds on 24–26 March 1966 and 1 March 1967 (Bundy and Warr 1980), while none have been reported previously from the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. The species breeds not far from Saudi Arabia, in south-west Iran to the north of the Arabian Gulf.

REFERENCES


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