

# Winter Bunting Count in Myanmar



**Biodiversity And Nature Conservation Association (BANCA)** 

April 2023

#### **INTRODUCTION**

Myanmar supports 10 different species of Bunting which are Yellow-breasted Bunting Emberiza aureola, Black-headed Bunting Emberiza melanocephala, Chestnut-eared Bunting Emberiza fucata, Little Bunting Emberiza pusilla, Black-faced Bunting Emberiza spodocephala, Chestnut Bunting Emberiza rutile, Tristram's Bunting Emberiza tristrami, Godlewski's Bunting Emberiza godlewskii, Crested Bunting Emberiza lathami and Yellowthroated Bunting Emberiza elegans. Of these, Godlewski's Bunting, Crested Bunting and Yellow-throated Bunting are resident and others are migrant and winter visitor species in Myanmar. Until recently, the status of all Bunting species is not known yet and still gaps the information in the country. During this project period, we were only able to survey the Yellowbreasted Bunting (YBB). But we collected data on all Bunting species from the birders. The YBB is currently listed as Critically Endangered on the basis of a rapid population decline, driven primarily by trapping in its passage and non-breeding ranges (BirdLife International 2023). Myanmar also previously held an important wintering population of this species (Smythies 1986), but no detailed information has been available since 2000. This species is listed as a totally protected species under the Conservation of Biodiversity and Protected Areas Law in Myanmar (Ministry of Natural Resources and Environmental Conservation 2018). Late 2002, YBB has been found at very few sites, including at the Indawgyi Biosphere Reserve and Hukaung Valley Wildlife Sanctuary in Kachin State, Kalaw area and Inlay Lake Wildlife Sanctuary in Shan State, Pale area in Sagaing Region, Mandalay, Kyauk Se and Bagan areas in Mandalay Region, Kyauktan area in Yangon Region and Maupin, Pantanaw and Wakema areas in Ayeyarwady Region. The objectives of this project were to: (1) promote the winter bunting count in Myanmar (2) document the current abundance and distribution of YBB in the country, (3) stimulate active public involvement in research and conservation of YBB and (4) assess the threats facing in survey area.

#### AREA SURVEYED AND SURVEY TIMING

Based on the compilation and review of past recorded of Yellow-breasted Bunting in Myanmar. These results indicated that Yellow-breasted Bunting were most abundant in Kyon Ka Pyin – Tap Seik Community Conservation Area in Wakema Township, Ayeyarwady Region. Therefore, we focused our bunting surveys in eight study sites which has covered 162 ha of paddy fields and tall grassland. (See Figure. The surveys were conducted at 5 days per month between January, February, March and April 2023. (Figure 1 & 2))

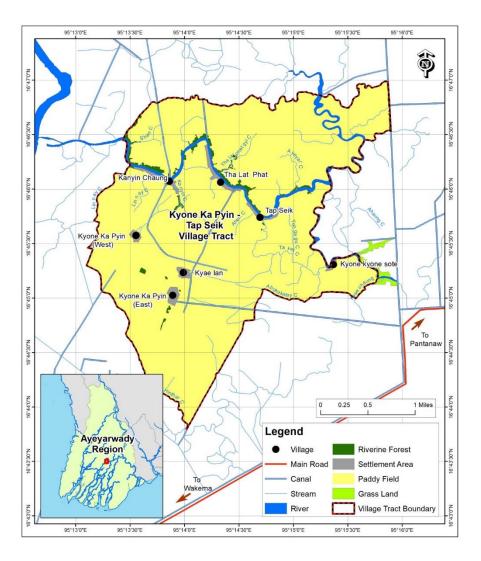
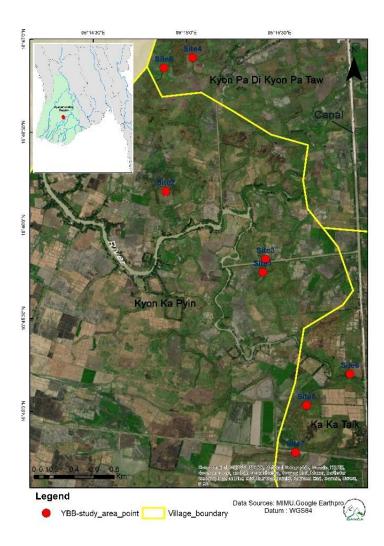
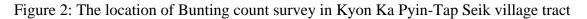


Figure 1: Bunting count surveyed site





## **Participants:**

- 1. Thet Zaw Naing
- 2. Lay Win
- 3. Lay Ko Ko
- 4. Thiri Sandar Zaw (Biodiversity And Nature Conservation Association)
- 5. Sein Myint (Kyon Ka Pyin Tap Seik Community Conservation Group)
- 6. Win Ko (Kyon Ka Pyin Tap Seik Community Conservation Group)
- 7. Ye Htike Soe (Kyon Ka Pyin Tap Seik Community Conservation Group)

## **Survey Methods**

Before field work, we distributed the information of Bunting counting during the wintering season in Myanmar through email and social media (Face book). We collected the information of bunting observation throughout Myanmar by formulated data sheet through Google drive. Then, brochures and leaflets with information about Yellow-breasted Bunting were distributed

to local people from the villages of Kyon Ka Pyin – Tap Seik Community Conservation area and other villages in Wakema Township, Ayeyarwady Region. Roost count was used to count the number of bunting mainly attention on Yellow-breasted Bunting. The survey covered a total of (162) ha in Tap Seik Community Conservation Area (Table 1). During the first two days of the first survey period in January 2023, we visited and studied at suitable habitats for the buntings to roost. There are Yellow-breasted Bunting in these sites but they do not roost, so we studied the flight patch to roost. In the following days we surveyed potential roosting sites along the routes the birds had flown to roost, and we surveyed roosting YBBs in the late afternoon and dusk. When we found the birds coming to roost, we divided the group into two groups and one group counted at birds coming from the southeast and northeast, while the other group counted at birds coming from the southwest and northwest. So that when we counted the number of birds, we were able to avoid overlap counting and avoid running out of birds to count. Motorized boats were used to access the survey areas and Yellow-breasted Bunting counting sites were approached on foot. Human activities, threats to Buntings and their impacts were also observed. In addition, we collected information of Yellow-breasted Bunting from areas that could not be surveyed through phone, email and social media. We did the monitoring on the population and distribution of Yellow-breasted Bunting at the same survey areas from February to April 2023.

<b>Table 1.</b> Roost Count Locations and dates undertaken in Kyon Ka Pyin – Tap Seik	
Community Conservation Area from January to April 2023.	

Site No.	Coordinates	Total Area covered the study sites (ha)
Ι	N 16.762475, E 95.256815	12
II	N 16.7697, E 95.248155	16
III	N16.763635, E 95.257077	20
IV	N16.781678, E 95.250552	35
V	N16.750548, E 95.26074	29
VI	N16.753355, E 95.264617	16
VII	N16.746342, E 95.259745	12
VIII	N16.780755, E 95.247985	22

## Behavioral identification of roosting bird species

Where the Yellow-breasted Bunting is roosting, Weaver and Sparrow, who are similar in size and shape to Yellow-breasted Bunting are also come to roost. Therefore, these can be misidentified, but Yellow- breasted Bunting and other species can be easily identified by observing the different flight behavior of each species when they are coming to roost. The Weaver flies in from low, close to each other in a group. When they reach the reed forest (grassland) where they roost, they fly close to the top of the forest and enter the forest to roost. Sparrow comes in groups or singly, and like Weaver, they fly and roost. Yellow-breasted Bunting does not fly close together in groups. One by one from the heights they come in succession and descend straight from the height to their roosting place.

## RESULTS

#### **Current observation of Yellow -breasted Bunting**

We collected information of Yellow-breasted Bunting and other bunting species from areas that could not be surveyed through phone, email, social media and requested the information through data format by using google drive during migration season. All of the data of bunting observation throughout Myanmar that was set up in data entry format and that was attached with report.

Roost counts were conducted at a total of 8 sites in Kyone ka pyin village, Ayeyarwaddy delta. A total of two roosting sites for Yellow-breasted Bunting were recorded in site IV (n= 2517) and site V (n= 2313) in January. In February, roosting site V was burnt in January and only one site IV as the roosting site (n= 3111) in February. But we found a total of 3201 individual of Yellow-breasted Bunting were observed at site VIII. Therefore, a total of 6312 individuals of YBB were recorded in February. There was no changes of Yellow-breasted Bunting but also other bird species were recorded. These observations are attached in Appendix 1.

#### **Potential Threats**

During the survey, reed forest (grassland) fires were detected at 3 sites including surveyed site V where Yellow- breasted Bunting roosted. We found that a large number of reeds were collected for use as firewood and reed mat and for use in agriculture. We found that some grassland had been converted to agricultural lands. The results of the survey indicate that can cause loss and degradation of Yellow- breasted Bunting habitats. Therefore, it is the major threat to the continued survival of Yellow-breasted Bunting in our study area. The survey team recorded a netting activity during the survey that is the significant threat to bird communities. Many bird species are prohibited from being killed or captured by Myanmar's Wildlife Act. However, most people are not aware of this legal status. Therefore, local people catch birds

everywhere and anytime. So that weak law enforcement and lack of awareness are also potential threats to birds in Myanmar.

## DISCUSSION

According to the historical sighting records of Yellow-breasted Bunting from 2001 to 2023, a total of seven bunting species throughout Myanmar, such as Black-faced Bunting, Chestnut Bunting, Chestnut-eared Bunting, Crested Bunting, Little Bunting, Yellow-breasted Bunting and Yellow-throated Bunting. The historical recorded on the distribution map of bunting species was shown in Figure 3- A & B.

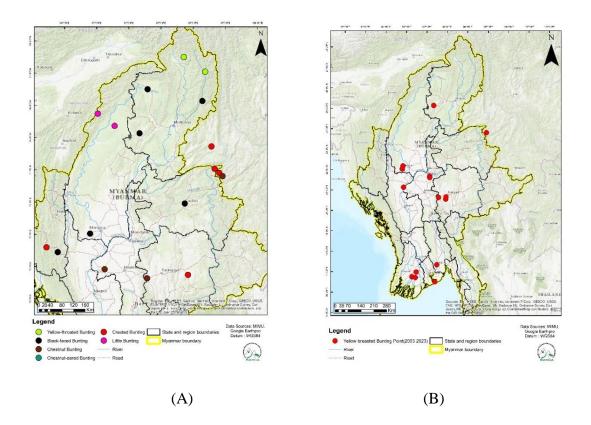
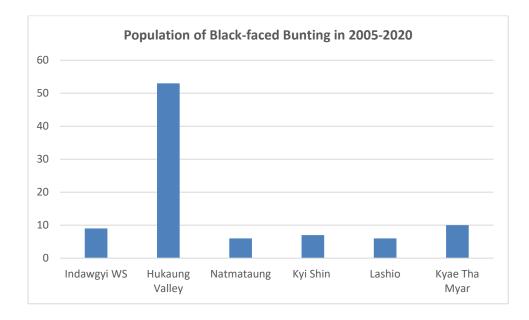


Figure 3: Distribution of Bunting species during 2001to 2003. (A) Recorded of total six Bunting species were in Myanmar. (B) Recorded of Yellow-breasted Bunting in throughout Myanmar.

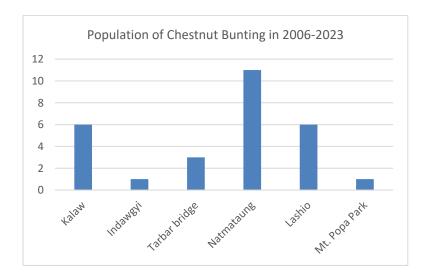
The detail of sighting records on the single species in Myanmar as follows.

## **Black-faced Bunting**



Black-faced Bunting was recorded in six area- Indawgyi Wildlife Sanctuary, Hukaung valley, Natmataung, Kyi Shin, Lashio and Kyae Tha Myar. These recorded are not from the in depth survey of bunting in Myanmar but the recorded is from the general bird survey during 2005 to 2020. The highest number of Black-faced Bunting (53 individual) was recorded in Hukaung valley in 2010. In 2020, we found that 6 individuals in the campus of Lashio University and 10 individuals in Kyae Ta Myar village, palei Township, Sagaing Region.

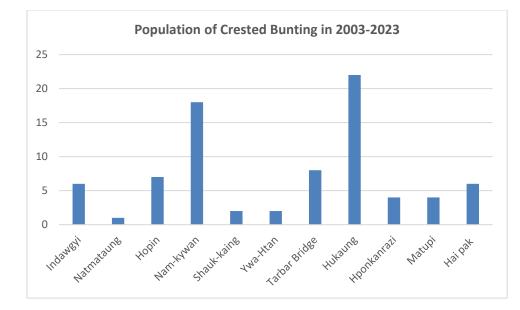
## **Chestnut Bunting**



Chestnut Bunting was recorded in six area- Kalaw, Indawgyi Wildlife Sanctaury, Tarbar bridge crossing Salween River- Shan state, Natmataung National Park, Lashio University and Popa Mountain Park. These recorded are not from the in- depth survey of bunting in Myanmar but the recorded is from the general bird survey during 2006 to 2023. The highest number of crested

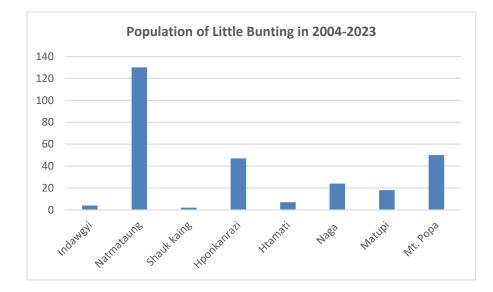
Bunting (11 individual) was recorded in Natmataung National Park in November 2010. In 2023, we found that one individual in Popa Mountain Park.

## **Crested Bunting**



Crested Bunting was recorded in 11 area- Indawgyi Wildlife Sanctaury, Natmataung national park, Hopin Township, Nam-kywan village, Shauk-kaing village, Ywa-Htan village, Tarbar bridge crossing Salween River- northern Shan state, Hukaung, Hponkanrazi, Matupi and Hai pak village. These recorded are not from the in- depth survey of bunting in Myanmar but the recorded is from the general bird survey during 2003 to 2023. The highest number of crested Bunting (22 individual) was recorded in Hukaung valley, northern Sagaing Reion in 2010. In 2023, we found that often in the village of Hai hpak and its environs.

## **Little Bunting**

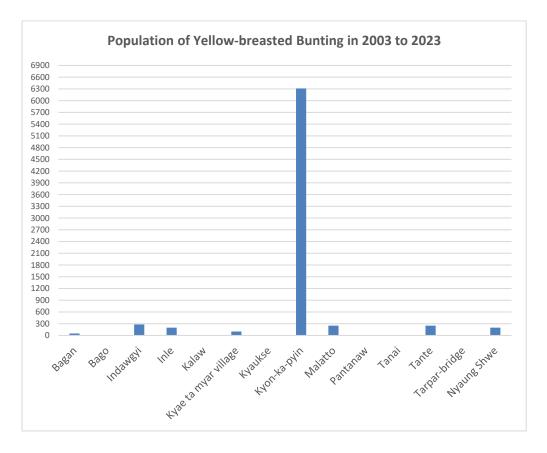


Little Bunting was recorded in eight area- Indawgyi Wildlife Sanctaury, Natmataung national park, Shauk-kaing village, Hponkanrazi, Htamati Wildlife Sanctuary, Naga area, Matupi township and Popa Mountain park. These recorded are not from the in- depth survey of bunting in Myanmar but the recorded is from the general bird survey during 2004 to 2023. The highest number of crested Bunting (more than 100 individual) was recorded in Natmataung National Park in 2017. In 2023, we found that 50 individuals of Little Bunting in Popa Mountain Park, Mandalay Region, central Myanmar.

# Yellow-throated Bunting

Yellow-throated Bunting was recorded in only two area in Kachin State, northern Myanmar. In 2009, 12 individuals was recorded in Kaung la hpu, east of May Hka river, Kachin state and two individuals were recorded in Hoponkanrazi, northern Kachin state. These recorded are not from the in- depth survey of bunting in Myanmar but the recorded is from the general bird survey during 2009 and 2011.

# **Yellow-breasted Bunting**



Yellow-breasted Bunting was recorded in fourteen areas- Bagan, Bago, Indawgyi Wildlife Sanctuary, Inle Wildlife Sanctuary, Kalaw, Kyae ta myar village, Kyaukse Town, Kyon ka pyin village track, Malatto Inn, Pantanaw town, Tanai, Tante village, Tarbar bridge crossing Salween River- Shan state, Nyaung Shwe Town. These recorded are not from the in- depth survey of bunting in Myanmar but the recorded is from the general bird survey during 2003 to

2023. The highest number of Yellow-breasted Bunting (6312 individuals) was recorded in Kyon ka pyin village track \_ Tap Seik Community Conservation Area in Wakema Township, Ayeyarwaddy Region in February, March and April 2023.

During the study period, we recorded 50 individuals at Indawgyi Biosphere Reserve area in Kachin State and 6312 individuals at Kyon Ka Pyin – Tap Seik Community Conservation Area. Our results indicate that the Kyon Ka Pyin – Tap Seik Community Conservation Area is of high national significance for the conservation of the species and potentially also of high global significance, and is potentially of a major global important site for Yellow-breasted Bunting. There are still remaining many sites to be surveyed on Yellow-breasted Bunting in Ayeyarwady Region, including the Wakema area and these sites are suitable habitats for Yellow-breasted Bunting in Myanmar. We also found that this Kyon ka- pyin is also providing this species as roosting sites in wintering season. Therefore more extensive surveys should be conducted to clarify its population status in this area for protect and prevent this Critically Endangered of Yellow-breasted Bunting bird species in the near future.

Information on YBB in Myanmar was obtained from bird surveyors, birding guides, bird photographers or other biodiversity and environmental conservation associations. However the status of YBB is not known yet and still gaps the information. We only had information on YBBs from 3 sites during this migration season, depending on the adverse political situation. The results indicated that more extensive surveys should be conducted to clarify YBB's population status in the near future. Not only the YBB, but also the status of the other Winter Bunting species is still unknown in Myanmar. Therefore surveys on these species should be conducted to clarify their distribution, status and potential threats in Myanmar.

The historical recorded sites of Yellow-breasted Bunting which are Maletto Inn and Pantanaw site in Ayeyarwady Region and Bagan site in Mandalay Region, where all recorded sites had been totally converted to fish ponds or agricultural lands recently. This construction of fishponds or agricultural lands can cause loss and degradation of the habitats of Yellow-breasted Bunting. Therefore, it is the major threat to the continued survival of Yellow-breasted Bunting in Myanmar. One bird that was captured to be released was found in Mandalay in March 2018, and another one in Bago was found in February 2023. In April 2023, one bird in the cage and it was released that was found in Madayar Township, Mandalay Region. Not only Yellow-breasted Bunting, but all passerines bird species were captured by hunters for food and sale for pets and released of religious purpose. Therefore, the hunting is a threat to the continued

survival of Yellow-breasted Bunting and other small passerines birds in Myanmar. Besides weak of law enforcement and lack of awareness are also potential threats to Yellow-breasted Bunting in there. Lessons learned from our studies suggested that more education/awareness programs will be required, and more Yellow-breasted Bunting surveys should be conducted to confirm the distribution and population status, and assess threats to habitat and bird in Myanmar.

#### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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**Appendix 1.** Recorded bird species in Kyon Ka Pyin – Tap Seik Community Conservation Area during the survey

No.	Species name	IUCN 2023	Total population
	ANATIDAE: DENDROCYGNINAE		
1	Lesser Whistling-duck Dendrocygna javanica		1450
	PODICIPEDIDAE		
2	Little Grebe Tachybaptus ruficollis		4
	CICONIIDAE		
3	Asian Openbill Anastomus oscitans		3000+
	THRESKIORNITHIDAE: THRESKIORNITHINAE		
4	Black-headed Ibis Threskiornis melanocephalus	NT	10
5	Glossy Ibis Plegadis falcinellus		56
	ARDEIDAE: BOTAURINAE		
6	Yellow Bittern Ixobrychus sinensis		15
7	Cinnamon Bittern Ixobrychus cinnamomeus		2
	ARDEIDAE: ARDEINAE		
8	Black-crowned Night-heron Nycticorax nycticorax		5
9	Indian Pond-heron Ardeola grayii		65
10	Cattle Egret Bubulcus ibis		150
11	Grey Heron Ardea cinerea		3
12	Purple Heron Ardea purpurea		18
13	Great Egret Ardea alba		1
14	Intermediate Egret Ardea intermedia		19
15	Little Egret <i>Egretta garzetta</i>		6
	PHALACROCORACIDAE		
16	Little Cormorant Microcarbo niger		50
	ANHINGIDAE		
17	Oriental Darter Anhinga melanogaster	NT	17
	FALCONIDAE: FALCONINAE		
18	Common Kestrel Falco tinnunculus		2
	FALCONIDAE: ACCIPITRINAE		
19	Oriental Honey-buzzard Pernis ptilorhynchus		1
20	Black-shouldered Kite Elanus caeruleus		2
21	Black-eared Kite <i>Milvus lineatus</i>		3
22	Brahminy Kite <i>Haliastur indus</i>		
23	Pied Harrier Circus melanoleucos		4
24	Shikra Accipiter badius		1
25	Greater Spotted Eagle Clanga clanga	VU	1
	RALLIDAE		
26	White-breasted Waterhen Amaurornis phoenicurus		1
27	Ruddy-breasted Crake Zapornia fusca		2
28	Watercock Gallicrex cinerea		4

No.	Species name	IUCN 2023	Total population
29	Grey-headed Swamphen Porphyrio poliocephalus		34
30	Common Moorhen Gallinula chloropus		16
	GRUIDAE: GRUINAE		
31	Sarus Crane Grus antigone	VU	41
	PLUVIALIDAE		
32	Pacific Golden Plover Pluvialis fulva		41
	RECURVIROSTRIDAE		
33	Black-winged Stilt Himantopus himantopus		13
	VANELLIDAE		
34	Grey-headed Lapwing Vanellus cinereus		9
35	Red-wattled Lapwing Vanellus indicus		25
	CHARADRIIDAE		
36	Little Ringed Plover Charadrius dubius		4
	JACANIDAE		
37	Pheasant-tailed Jacana Hydrophasianus chirurgus		2
38	Bronze-winged Jacana Metopidius indicus		3
	SCOLOPACIDAE: GALLINAGININAE		
39	Common Snipe Gallinago gallinago		2
	SCOLOPACIDAE: TRINGINAE		
40	Common Sandpiper Actitis hypoleucos		2
41	Wood Sandpiper Tringa glareola		60
	GLAREOLIDAE: GLAREOLINAE		
42	Oriental Pratincole Glareola maldivarum		74
	STERNIDAE		
43	Whiskered Tern Chlidonias hybrida		24
	COLUMBIDAE: COLUMBINAE		
44	Rock Pigeon Columba livia		16
45	Red Collared-dove Streptopelia tranquebarica		350
46	Spotted Dove Spilopelia chinensis		150
	COLUMBIDAE: TRERONINAE		
47	Yellow-footed Green-pigeon Treron phoenicopterus		1
	CUCULIDAE: CUCULINAE		
48	Plaintive Cuckoo Cacomantis merulinus		16
	CUCULIDAE: CENTROPADIDAE		
49	Greater Coucal Centropus sinensis		3
50	Lesser Coucal Centropus bengalensis		5
	TYTONIDAE: TYTONINAE		
51	Eastern Grass-owl Tyto longimembris		1
	STRIGIDAE		
52	Spotted Owlet Athene brama		5
53	Brown Boobook Ninox scutulata		1

No.	Species name	IUCN 2023	Total population
	APODIDAE: APODINAE		
54	Brown-backed Needletail Hirundapus giganteus		5
55	Asian Palm-swift Cypsiurus balasiensis		306
	CORACIIDAE		
56	Indochinese Roller Coracias affinis		1
	ALCEDINIDAE: HALCYONINAE		
57	White-throated Kingfisher Halcyon smyrnensis		35
	ALCEDINIDAE: ALCEDININAE		
58	Common Kingfisher Alcedo atthis		6
	ALCEDINIDAE: CERYLINAE		
59	Pied Kingfisher Ceryle rudis		2
	MEROPIDAE		
60	Asian Green Bee-eater Merops orientalis		41
61	Blue-tailed Bee-eater Merops philippinus		28
	RAMPHASTIDAE: MEGALAIMINAE		
62	Coppersmith Barbet Psilopogon haemacephalus		2
	PICIDAE: JYGNINAE		
63	Eurasian Wryneck Jynx torquilla		5
	PICIDAE: PICINAE		
64	Freckle-breasted Woodpecker Dendrocopos analis		24
	ORIOLIDAE		
65	Black-naped Oriole Oriolus chinensis		2
	ARTAMIDAE		
66	Ashy Woodswallow Artamus fuscus		29
	AEGITHINIDAE		
67	Common lora Aegithina tiphia		31
	RHIPIDURIDAE		
68	White-throated Fantail Rhipidura albicollis		29
	DICRURIDAE		
69	Black Drongo Dicrurus macrocercus		79
	MONARCHIDAE		
70	Black-naped Monarch Hypothymis azurea		1
	CORVIDAE		
71	House Crow Corvus splendens		25
72	Eastern Jungle Crow Corvus levaillantii		26
73	Rufous Treepie Dendrocitta vagabunda		3
	LANIIDAE		
74	Brown Shrike Lanius cristatus		31
	NECTARINIIDAE		
75	Olive-backed Sunbird Cinnyris jugularis		100
	DICAEIDAE		

No.	Species name	IUCN 2023	Total population
76	Scarlet-backed Flowerpecker Dicaeum cruentatum		2
	PLOCEIDAE		
77	Streaked Weaver Ploceus manyar		2500+
78	Baya Weaver Ploceus philippinus		480
79	Asian Golden Weaver Ploceus hypoxanthus	NT	3500+
	ESTRILDIDAE		
80	Red Avadavat Amandava amandava		41
	ESTRILDIDAE: LONCHURINAE		
81	White-rumped Munia Lonchura striata		120
82	Scaly-breasted Munia Lonchura punctulata		50
83	Chestnut Munia Lonchura atricapilla		148
	PASSERIDAE		
84	House Sparrow Passer domesticus		803
85	Plain-backed Sparrow Passer flaveolus		21
86	Eurasian Tree Sparrow Passer montanus		581
	MOTACILLIDAE		
87	Paddyfield Pipit Anthus rufulus		3
88	White Wagtail Motacilla alba		5
89	Citrine Wagtail Motacilla citreola		15
	EMBERIZIDAE		
90	Yellow-breasted Bunting Emberiza aureola	CR	6312
	STURNIDAE: STURNINAE		
91	Jungle Myna Acridotheres fuscus		174
92	Common Myna Acridotheres tristis		198
93	Indian Pied Starling Gracupica contra		59
94	Chestnut-tailed Starling Sturnia malabarica		29
	MUSCICAPIDAE: SAXICOLINAE		
95	Siberian Rubythroat Calliope calliope		2
96	Bluethroat Luscinia svecica		5
97	Siberian Stonechat Saxicola maurus		29
98	Pied Bushchat Saxicola caprata		18
	MUSCICAPIDAE: MUSCICAPINAE		
99	Blue-throated Flycatcher Cyornis rubeculoides		1
100	Verditer Flycatcher Eumyias thalassinus		1
101	Taiga Flycatcher Ficedula albicilla		12
102	Oriental Magpie-robin Copsychus saularis		27
	ALAUDIDAE		
103	Oriental Skylark Alauda gulgula		40
	PYCNONOTIDAE		
104	Ayeyarwady Bulbul Pycnonotus blanfordi		100
105	Red-whiskered Bulbul Pycnonotus jocosus		60

No.	Species name	IUCN 2023	Total population
106	Red-vented Bulbul Pycnonotus cafer		141
	HIRUNDINIDAE: HIRUNDININAE		
107	Grey-throated Snad Martin Riparia chinensis		73
108	Barn Swallow Hirundo rustica		724
109	Red-rumped Swallow Cecropis daurica		50
	PHYLLOSCOPIDAE		
110	Yellow-browed Warbler Phylloscopus inornatus		1
111	Dusky Warbler Phylloscopus fuscatus		57
	TIMALIIDAE		
112	Jerdon's Babbler Chrysomma altirostre	VU	10
113	Yellow-eyed Babbler Chrysomma sinense		24
114	Oriental White-eye Zosterops palpebrosus		11
115	Chestnut-capped Babbler Timalia pileata		24
116	Striated Babbler Argya earlei		12
	ACROCEPHALIDAE		
117	Black-browed Reed-warbler Acrocephalus bistrigiceps		12
118	Oriental Reed-warbler Acrocephalus orientalis		50
119	Thick-billed Warbler Arundinax aedon		2
	MEGALURIDAE		
120	Pallas's Grasshopper Warbler Helopsaltes certhiola		1
121	Baikal Bush-warbler Locustella davidi		3
122	Striated Grassbird Cincloramphus palustris		71
	CISTICOLIDAE		
123	Zitting Cisticola Cisticola juncidis		24
124	Common Tailorbird Orthotomus sutorius		12
125	Rufescent Prinia Prinia rufescens		2
126	Grey-breasted Prinia Prinia hodgsonii		6
127	Yellow-bellied Prinia Prinia flaviventris		15
128	Plain Prinia Prinia inornata		101

# Plate 1: Photo record



## Plate 2: Photo record



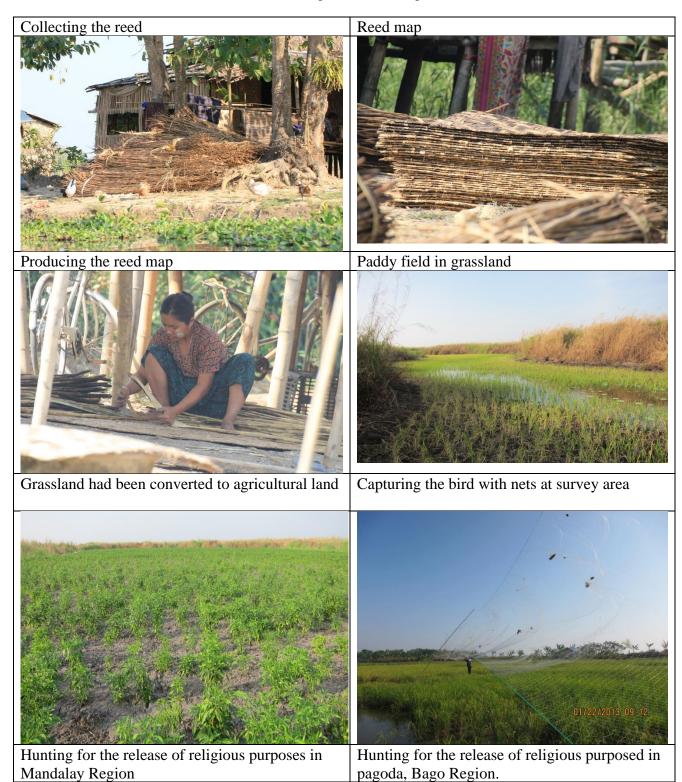


Plate 3: Photo record on the threat to the roosting site of Bunting

