

bill 133.9 mm; total length 460 mm; weight 520 g. Moulting score: 5⁴4¹2⁰4. The bird was banded with Malaysian metal band V-08368.

Fourteen other species of waterbirds were caught and banded from 20–22 November 1992, when the oystercatcher was netted (Table 1).

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Rusty-bellied Shortwing *Brachypteryx hyperythra* at Lava, Darjeeling, India in April and June 1996

IWEIN MAURO and EDWARD VERCRUYSE

Between 24–29 April 1996 the authors, together with Bram Demeulemeester, were birding the remnant primary forest, tall secondary growth and cleared, scrubby areas around the village of Lava, Darjeeling, northern West Bengal, India. While searching along the road towards the Neora valley at about 2,000 m elevation in the morning of 27 April our attention was suddenly drawn towards a previously unnoticed clear, loud and musical song emanating from a damp well-vegetated gully nearby. In response to tape playback of the sound recorded song our mystery bird soon popped out and IM, being first to get a good look at it, readily identified it as a male Rusty-bellied Shortwing *Brachypteryx hyperythra*, a virtually unknown and much sought-after eastern Himalayas species. Fortunately it was one of those star-performing individuals, which stayed around long enough until the three of us obtained highly satisfying views while it was singing its head off at point-blank range. Meanwhile a second male had started vocalizing nearby. In early June EV revisited Lava,

resulting in no less than nine different territorial males being found in the same general area. Our observations constitute the first definite records of Rusty-bellied Shortwing for the Darjeeling area since 1920 and remain one of the very few field observations throughout the species's restricted range.

The following description was compiled on the strength of field notes and sound recordings taken on 27 April 1996. Copies of these recordings were deposited at the British Library National Sound Archive, Wildlife Section, London.

SIZE AND STRUCTURE A typical *Brachypteryx*, featuring a rounded head, short straight bill, short rounded wings, short square tail and noticeably long tarsi. Similar in size and general build to Lesser Shortwing *B. leucophrys* and noticeably smaller, more slender and shorter tailed than White-browed Shortwing *B. montana* (neither species seen in direct comparison). Primary projection short, encompassing about 15% of

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visible tertial length. Wing-tip falling midway along the tail.

HEAD AND NECK Chin, throat and chest orange-rufous, sharply demarcated from rest of head, which was a deep dark blue similar to that of *B. montana*. Relatively obvious supercilium starting close to base of upper mandible, broadest midway along the lores and gradually tapering out to just behind eye.

UPPERPARTS Uniformly deep dark blue as in *B. montana*.

UNDERPARTS Uniformly orange-rufous.

BARE PARTS Bill black except for small pale horn area restricted to base of lower mandible. Legs pale flesh-colored. Iris blackish.

VOICE The song can be transcribed as a fast, clear, very liquid and musical warble consisting of a long series of quickly alternating up and down, slightly slurred notes, distinctly introduced by a short *tu-tiu* or *wi-tu* note and usually lasting up to 4.4 seconds, ending abruptly. Lesser Shortwing almost invariably utters a much shorter, generally only lasting up to 2.25 seconds, far less liquid, though also distinctly introduced, brief musical warbling song of about 10-12 notes alternating up and down and finally quickly accelerating into, and abruptly ending with a distinctive short twittering, sometimes seemingly chirping note. The song of White-browed Shortwing usually lasting up to 3.5 seconds and although more variable is very different from that of the previous two species being noticeably higher-pitched and a more explosive, much more slurring warble, introduced by up to three characteristic whistled *wheez* notes (see Figure 1). In song the Rusty-bellied Shortwing held its tail half-cocked, while the wings were held slightly drooped.

Grimmett *et al.* (1998) list White-browed Bush Robin *Tarsiger indicus*, Indian Blue Robin *Luscinia brunnea* and Snowy-browed Flycatcher *Ficedula hyperythra* as possible confusion species, all of which have different songs and general build, and lack entirely orange-rufous underparts. It was noteworthy that the individual Rusty-bellied Shortwing we observed differed somewhat from the plate in Grimmett *et al.* (1998) in having the entire underparts, including the abdomen, uniformly orange-rufous.

Historically, Rusty-bellied Shortwing is known with certainty from specimens secured in north-east India from the Darjeeling area, Sikkim, Assam, Arunachal Pradesh and, doubtfully, Nagaland. One specimen is labelled 'Nepal' but its provenance has been questioned (Heath 1988). Surprisingly, during the period 23-28 May 1973 a male and female were collected at Gongshan, north-west Yunnan Province, China, suggesting the species probably ranges more widely throughout the eastern Himalayas. Indeed Stattersfield *et al.* (1998), despite the general lack of published evidence, tentatively treat it as occurring from eastern Nepal, throughout Bhutan, Arunachal Pradesh, to south-east Tibet and northern Myanmar, and possibly in the Nagaland, Manipur and Cachar hills. For a comprehensive review of historical records see Heath (1988).

Recent published reports of the species are of three collected in and near Namdapha National Park, Arunachal Pradesh in 1987/1988 and one sighted in Kamlang Wildlife Sanctuary, Arunachal Pradesh in 1994 (Athreya *et al.* 1997; Collar *et al.* 1994; Heath 1988; Kaul *et al.* 1995). Our own observations confirm the continued presence of Rusty-bellied Shortwing in the Darjeeling area, where the species disappeared from the record after May 1920, when one was collected at Mangpu at 1,100 m elevation by G. E. Shaw (Heath 1988).

While we recorded White-browed and Lesser Shortwings from a variety of habitats, all our observations of *B. hyperythra* came from relatively steep, damp, densely vegetated gullies within secondary growth and, clearly, this appeared to form the decisive factor in the occurrence of the species. Collar *et al.* (1994) rank Rusty-bellied Shortwing as Vulnerable. However, certain factors provide an optimistic view for its long-term survival: large tracts of forest remain undisturbed in parts of the eastern Himalayas; the species occupies quite a wide altitudinal range; and it appears to tolerate habitat degradation to some extent (as indicated by our observations in secondary growth). Nevertheless, the species may already have suffered considerably from forest loss and habitat alteration within the lower part of its altitudinal distribution. In winter Rusty-bellied Shortwing has been recorded as low as 540 m, indicating a seasonal dependence on lowland and foothill tropical evergreen and semi-evergreen rainforests, which are increasingly coming under pressure in the region. Historically it has, however, also been found utilizing thick secondary scrub and dense thickets of reeds in winter (Stevens 1914). A male seen on 27 January 1912 at 3,000 m around Tonglu, West Bengal by Stevens (1925) was in dense *Arundinaria* bamboo.

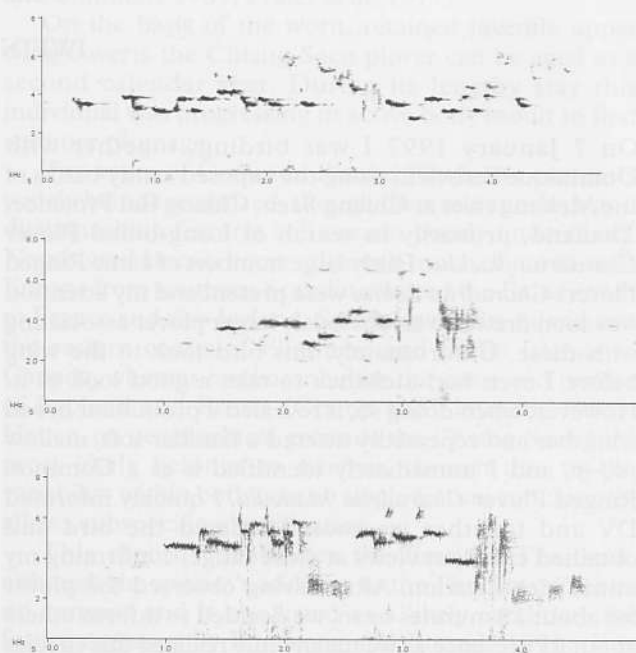


Figure 1. Sonograms of the songs of Rusty-bellied Shortwing *Brachypteryx hyperythra* (upper), Lesser Shortwing *Brachypteryx leucophrys* (centre) and White-browed Shortwing *Brachypteryx montana* (lower), April and June 1996, Lava, Darjeeling, NE India (E. Verccruysse).

Elusive ground-dwelling tropical forest bird species, long characterized as exceedingly rare, often prove to be reasonably common once their vocalizations have been recognized. Our observations at a reasonably well-watched locality suggest that Rusty-bellied Shortwing is probably greatly overlooked and at least locally common where its habitat requirements are met. As noted by Crosby (1996) ornithological coverage of the eastern Himalayas Endemic Bird Area is still very much in its infancy. Many parts of the region have always been difficult to access because of logistical and political reasons. It is hoped that, armed with the new information contained herein, and with the rapidly improving situation on visiting north-east India and Myanmar more people will try to seek out *Brachypteryx hyperythra* and other little known taxa in this exciting region.

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Common Ringed Plover *Charadrius hiaticula*: a new species for Thailand

IWEIN MAURO

On 7 January 1997 I was birding, together with Dominique Verbelen, along the exposed sandy banks of the Mekong river at Chiang Saen, Chiang Rai Province, Thailand, primarily in search of Long-billed Plover *Charadrius placidus*. Fairly large numbers of Little Ringed Plovers *Charadrius dubius* were present and my attention was soon drawn to an obviously larger plover associating with these. Unfortunately, this bird took to the wing before I even had a chance to take a good look at it. However, when doing so, it revealed a prominent broad wing-bar and repeatedly uttered a familiar soft, mellow *poo-ip*, and I immediately identified it as a Common Ringed Plover *Charadrius hiaticula*. I quickly informed DV and together we soon relocated the bird and obtained excellent views at close range, confirming my initial identification. After having observed the plover for about 15 minutes or so, we decided to inform others about its presence as we meanwhile realized this species was not treated in Boonsong and Round (1991). Shortly afterwards we returned to the spot, together with Raf Drijvers, and easily relocated the bird, now enabling sound recordings of the flight calls to be made. Jim

Chance saw the bird later that day and fortunately took the trouble to put the word out so that it was later seen by quite a few Thai birdwatchers. L. Bruce Kekule managed to obtain some good photographs of the bird on 17 January and on 28 January it was seen by Kant Ratanajun (P. D. Round *in litt.*). This represents the first record ever of Common Ringed Plover for Thailand.

Based on my own field notes made on 07 January 1997, slides taken by LBK on 17 January 1997 and sound recordings obtained by RD and DV on 07 January 1997, I compiled the following description.

SIZE and STRUCTURE A small-sized though robust, stocky *Charadrius* with rather large square head, short, straight, slightly stubby bill and relatively short, powerful legs. In direct comparison with Little Ringed Plover *C. dubius* appeared about 20% larger, proportionately shorter and thicker billed, shorter legged and noticeably more dumpy and pot-bellied with less attenuated rear-end. In flight showed noticeably longer wings and tail, resulting in more purposeful flight action. Primary projection short, encompassing about 20% of visible