

Notes

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The origin of 'Caspian Gulls' breeding in Poland

The 'Caspian Gull' *Larus (argentatus) cachinnans* originally inhabited southeast Europe, where it bred on flat, sandy lagoons along the coast and at steppe reservoirs (Yudin & Firsova 1988). The population has increased significantly in the past 100 years, however, which has resulted in range expansion to the north and west, a trend that is still clear in Ukraine, Poland, and Belarus (BirdLife International 2004). As the bird's range expanded, new breeding sites were established primarily along large rivers in Russia (Volga) and Ukraine (Dnepr, Dnestr); the species arrived in the Moscow area in the 1960s (Jonsson 1998; Panov & Monzиков 1999), whereas in west-central Ukraine it reached the Cherkassy district during the 1970s (A. Poluda pers. comm.) and the first breeding record in Ivano-Frankovsk district was in 1989 (Gorban 1992). During the 1980s, a breeding population was established along the Vistula River, east-central Poland (Tomiałojć & Stawarczyk 2003). The Polish breeding population has subsequently increased exponentially, reaching 480 pairs in 2004, and over 500 pairs in 2005 (Skórka *et al.* 2005; Neubauer *et al.* 2006; authors' unpublished data). Skórka *et al.* (2005) showed that the growth of the colony in Tarnów must have been due largely to immigration, as local production of young was insufficient to explain the colony's growth.

Between 1999 and 2006, about 500 large white-headed gulls were trapped at inland breeding colonies in central and southern Poland, and three ringing recoveries of Caspian Gull were obtained. All three breeding adults had been ringed as chicks in Ukraine, confirming the eastern origin of Caspian Gulls breeding in Poland (table 1). Almost all the adult Caspian Gulls trapped in Poland are unringed, and there are few individuals of local origin; presumably, most of the former come from eastern, perhaps Ukrainian, colonies. Caspian Gulls are still expanding in middle Dnepr valley area, where new breeding sites are established each year (A. Poluda pers. comm.).

Identification of (unringed) Caspian Gulls in Polish breeding colonies requires caution because hybridisation between Caspian and Herring Gulls *L. argentatus argentatus* in Poland is frequent (Neubauer *et al.* 2006). Criteria used by the authors were defined by determining the range of morphological variation of 56 Caspian Gulls trapped at Molochnyy Lyman, Zaporozhye district, southern Ukraine in 2000–01, a population that apparently functions as a source of immigrants (see table 1). The most important characters for Caspian Gulls are as follows: intensive iris pigmentation (medium-dark to dark, only exceptionally weakly spotted dark); slim bill (with bill-shape

Table 1. Ringing recoveries of 'Caspian Gull' *Larus (argentatus) cachinnans* breeding in Poland.

Ring no.	Ringing data	Recovery data	Distance
Kiev L 002483	Dnepr River, Kanivska GES, Cherkassy district, Ukraine, 49°46'N 31°28'E, pullus, 23rd May 2000	Włocławek Reservoir, central Poland, 52°39'N 19°08'E, 7th May 2005, female, controlled at nest with eggs	917.2 km
Kiev L 000731	Dnepr River, Kanivska GES, Cherkassy district, Ukraine, 49°46'N 31°28'E, pullus, 8th June 1998	Jankowice gravel-pit, near Zator, southern Poland 50°02'N 19°26'E, 23th April 2005, female, controlled at nest with eggs	863.3 km
Moskwa C 513828	Island Podkova, Molochnyy Lyman, Zaporozhye district, Ukraine, 46°37'N 35°22'E, pullus, 24th May 2000	Jankowice gravel-pit, near Zator, southern Poland, 50°02'N 19°26'E, 1st May 2006, male, controlled at nest with eggs	1238.4 km

index – bill length divided by bill depth at gonys – above 3.00); and intense bare-part colours (orange to red eye-ring and gape). Also critical is the pattern on the outermost primary: a deep (whitish) tongue on the inner web; subterminal black area, measured along the shaft at less than 42 mm in females and less than 53 mm in males; and pure white feather tip, typically longer than the subterminal black area, 56–73 mm in females and 60–75 mm in males. Although the range of variation in Caspian Gulls is probably much wider than these criteria suggest, ongoing hybridisation demands a conservative approach. Trapped individuals which do not meet these criteria are classed as intermediates, although several of these may also be 'pure' Caspian Gulls.

Two ringed Caspian Gulls were trapped in a colony at Jankowice, where this species has bred since at least 1999 (Faber *et al.* 2001; Neubauer *et al.* 2006); the colony size there remains stable, with c. 120 breeding pairs. The third ringed bird was trapped at Włocławek Reservoir in 2005, where a colony of some 125–130 pairs have bred since 1999 (the colony was first established in 1985). Many of these are Herring Gulls; Caspian Gulls and mixed pairs (Herring × Caspian) constitute less than half the colony, although the numbers of Caspian Gulls increase each year. The Ukrainian-ringed female was paired with a male Caspian Gull and laid three eggs; two young hatched successfully (on 8th and 9th May) and both were colour-ringed on 25th May. Despite intensive fieldwork, the female was not seen in 2006 or 2007, although its mate in 2005 was seen many times, apparently paired with another female.

Other ringing recoveries show that immigrants from remote parts of the breeding range of Caspian Gull are bolstering central European populations of this species. Natal dispersal distances of 800–1,200 km may not be exceptional and may even prove to be quite normal for this species. This contrasts with the behaviour of the closely related

Herring Gull, which shows a high degree of natal philopatry. For example, most birds from the Isle of May were reported breeding within 100 km of their natal colony, with exceptional individuals travelling 400–565 km (Duncan & Monaghan 1977); for the British population as a whole, natal dispersal distance was also small, with just single individuals recovered as far away as Iceland or Spain (Wernham *et al.* 2002; note that breeding was assumed only by recovery timing and breeding age).

Although Caspian Gull remains an uncommon vagrant in many parts of western Europe, its westernmost breeding populations, in Poland and eastern Germany, are increasing (Klein 2001; Neubauer *et al.* 2006). Moreover,



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235 & 236. Adult female 'Caspian Gull' *Larus (argentatus) cachinnans*, trapped in central Poland, May 2005. This bird had been ringed as a pullus in the Cherkassy district of Ukraine (almost 920 km away), in May 2000. It shows typical characters of Caspian Gull: medium-dark iris; dark orange eye-ring and gape; bill-shape index (see text) of 3.11; and characteristic pattern on outermost primary – deep, whitish tongue on inner web, subterminal black area measured at 30 mm along the shaft and a pure white tip, 63 mm long.

westerly dispersal of young birds (Malling Olsen & Larsson 2003; Klein & Neubauer 2006) may cause occasional individuals to breed with Herring and Lesser Black-backed Gulls *L. fuscus* in western Europe, far from the regular breeding range.

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The status of Black-headed and Red-headed Buntings on Helgoland

There is no Heligoland but Heligoland, and Gätke is its prophet. (Coues 1895)

No other site in Europe has produced such a long series of observations of migrants as Helgoland, Germany, which has data stretching back to the 1840s. As well as monitoring population trends of regular species, such long-term data is invaluable when analysing occurrence patterns of rarities and, in some cases, can provide pointers to whether they are genuine vagrants or of captive origin. In Europe, vagrant Black-headed Buntings *Emberiza melanocephala* to the north-west of their breeding range are usually considered to be genuine vagrants, whereas similar records of Red-headed Buntings *E. bruniceps* are generally regarded as escapes. Both species have occurred on Helgoland on several occasions and these records are analysed in this note.

Since 1845, when the first Black-headed Bunting was recorded, there have been 38 claims of that species and 24 of Red-headed Bunting, up

to the end of 2006. Recently, all records of both species have been assessed by the Helgoland Rarities Committee (HAK), while most records since 1976 have also been reviewed by the German Rarities Committee (DSK); in total, 27 records of Black-headed and 18 of Red-headed Buntings have been accepted. One Red-headed Bunting that showed some intermediate characters and may have been a hybrid Red-headed × Black-headed Bunting was accepted by DSK as Red-headed Bunting and is treated here as such. Eight birds, mainly female/immatures in autumn, were accepted as either Black-headed or Red-headed.

Since the mid nineteenth century, recording effort has varied according to the levels of hunting (in the nineteenth century) and, more recently, ringing effort and the numbers of bird-watchers present. Dierschke *et al.* (2004) developed an index to correct for these differences between years, for common species. This index is less appropriate for rarities, but is still relevant; thus, fig. 1 shows the distribution of records of

the two species over time, with an indication of recording effort.

Black-headed Bunting

In the nineteenth century, there were 13 records, consisting of ten males and three females. Some data have clearly been lost, since Gätke (1895) stated that he obtained 14 males. Two of the 13 were first-year birds, the remainder were adults. In their recent review, HAK accepted all spring records between 23rd May and 18th June, while all autumn records were accepted as indeterminate Black-headed/Red-headed. Just five were recorded between 1900 and 1993, all in May and June, despite good coverage from 1910 to 1940, and again in the 1980s. Since 1994, Black-headed Bunting has been recorded almost annually. As in the nineteenth century, most recent records have been in late spring, between 13th May and 19th June, and there is just one record outside this period, on 29th July 1999 (Dierschke *et al.* 2000). All recent autumn records have been accepted only as indeterminate Black-headed/Red-headed Buntings.

Red-headed Bunting

One on 20th June 1860 and an earlier, undated, sighting are the only records during the nineteenth century and the first modern record was not until 1959. From 1959 until 1972, there were no fewer than 11 accepted records of 13 birds. The timing of these records differs from that expected for vagrants from the southeast, however, as there are three in April and two in July (fig. 2). Since 1972, this species has once more become extremely rare, with just five single males seen: on 22nd May 1981, 1st July 1989, 8th–10th June 1990, 3rd September 1991 and 14th

June 1997.

Three birds accepted as either Black-headed or Red-headed Bunting have been recorded between 13th May and 9th June, and a further five between 17th August and 15th September.

Weather data for Helgoland were available from 1950 onwards. Although sample sizes are small and the results merely indicative, the findings from an analysis relating weather conditions to migrant arrivals are still interesting. Black-headed Buntings have appeared in most wind directions, but most are found on days with easterly winds. Three out of five recent (post-1975) Red-headed Buntings have arrived in east or southeasterly winds, yet arrivals between 1950 and 1975 showed a much wider spread of wind directions, with equal-highest numbers from the southeast, south and southwest (fig. 3).

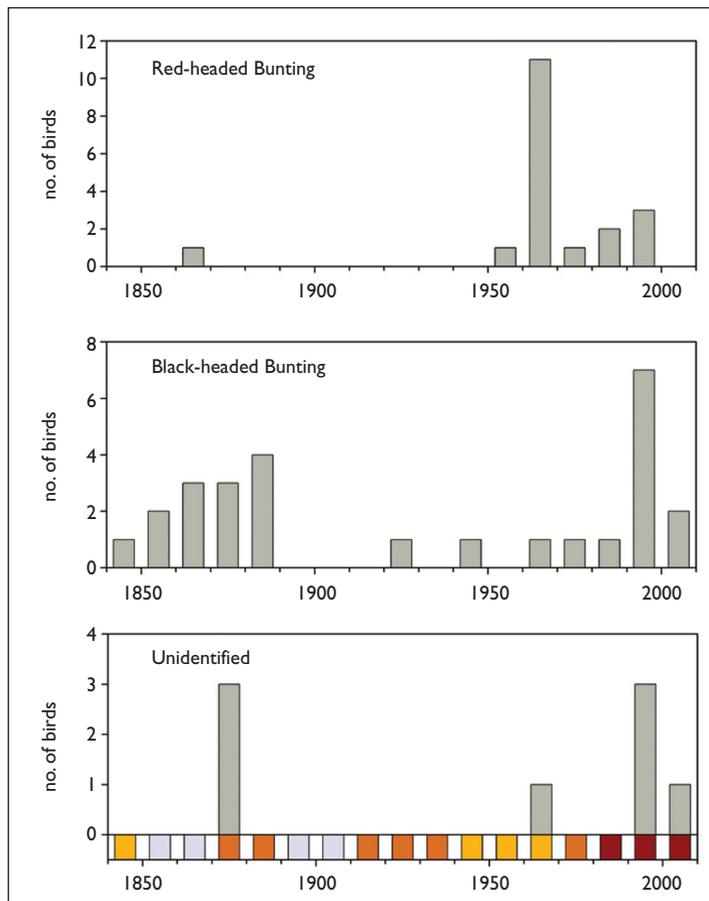


Fig. 1. Ten-year totals for Red-headed Bunting *Emberiza bruniceps* (n=19), Black-headed Bunting *E. melanocephala* (n=27) and unidentified Red-headed/Black-headed Buntings (n=8) on Helgoland, Germany, between 1840 and 2004. The lower bar estimates the intensity of hunting and bird-recording activity on the island: lilac = poor coverage, yellow = medium, orange = good, brown = very good (following Dierschke *et al.* 2004).

Discussion

Establishing the likelihood of genuine vagrancy in a species widely held in captivity is always difficult. For many southeast European species, vagrancy to northwest Europe in spring shows a well-established pattern. Annual or near-annual migrants on Helgoland, including Short-toed Lark *Calandrella brachydactyla* and Subalpine Warbler *Sylvia cantillans*, show a distinct arrival peak from mid May to mid June (e.g. Dierschke *et al.* 2001), and a number of rare vagrants, such as Rock Thrush *Monticola saxatilis*, Asian Desert *S. nana* and Spectacled Warblers *S. conspicillata* and Cinereous Bunting *E. cineracea*, have also been recorded at this time. However, birds escaping from captivity, retaining their original migratory urge, could also produce

such a pattern.

Both Black-headed and Red-headed Buntings begin their spring migration in late March, arriving on their breeding grounds from late April to mid May. Autumn migration commences in late July and birds reach wintering areas in September and October (Glutz von Blotzheim & Bauer 1997). Migratory birds in captivity generally show 'Zugunruhe' (migratory restlessness) throughout the migration period; it would be expected that restlessness (and thus escape potential) in captive Black-headed and Red-headed Buntings would be highest in April and again in late July/early August, while genuine vagrants to northwest Europe would appear a few weeks after the main arrival on, or departure from, the

breeding areas. The pattern of Black-headed Buntings on Helgoland clearly matches this expected vagrancy pattern, with the exception of one record in late July. Gätke (1895) suspected that late arrivals (for example those in mid June) might be failed breeders which resume migration and occur on Helgoland later than established migration timings might suggest. Consequently, the majority of Black-headed Buntings on Helgoland may well be genuine vagrants.

For Red-headed Bunting, the pattern is rather more complicated. Records prior to 1950 and after 1975 mostly fit the expected vagrancy pattern, although these include a rather late spring record, on 1st July 1990, and an adult male in autumn, on 3rd September 1991. The pattern between 1950 and 1975 is quite different, with three records in late April, unusually early for a southeastern vagrant, and two in mid July, but also eight within the expected vagrancy window. Given that almost 40% of these

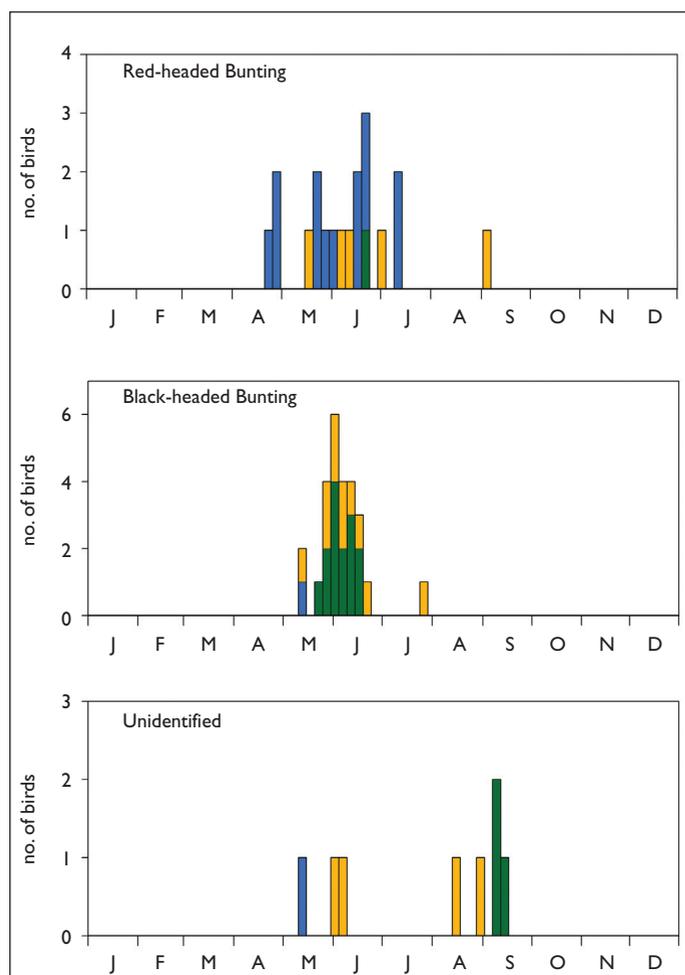


Fig. 2. Five-day totals for Red-headed Bunting *Emberiza bruniceps*, Black-headed Bunting *E. melanocephala* and unidentified Red-headed/Black-headed Buntings on Helgoland, Germany, prior to 1950 (green), 1951–1975 (blue) and 1976–2004 (yellow).

records do not fit the expected pattern and that Red-headed Bunting was common in captivity during this time, many of the records from this period probably relate to escapes. During this same period, there were several records of Red-headed Bunting from other regions in Germany, often in unusual places (e.g. towns or cities) and/or at unusual times (e.g. Radtke 1959, Hammerschmidt 1966, Bauer 1967, Wüst 1986). Since 1975, Red-headed Bunting has become much more scarce in captivity (see Vinicombe 2007) and spring records on Helgoland since 1981 fit the expected pattern of south-eastern vagrants, in terms of both time of arrival and prevailing wind direction.

Old records (prior to 1950) of Red-headed Bunting from Helgoland are most likely to have been wild birds (category B) but, for the reasons set out above, records between 1950 and 1975 are perhaps best placed in category E. As shown, post-1975 records fit expected vagrancy patterns better, if not perfectly, and Red-headed Bunting is now on the German list in category D (Barthel & Helbig 2005).

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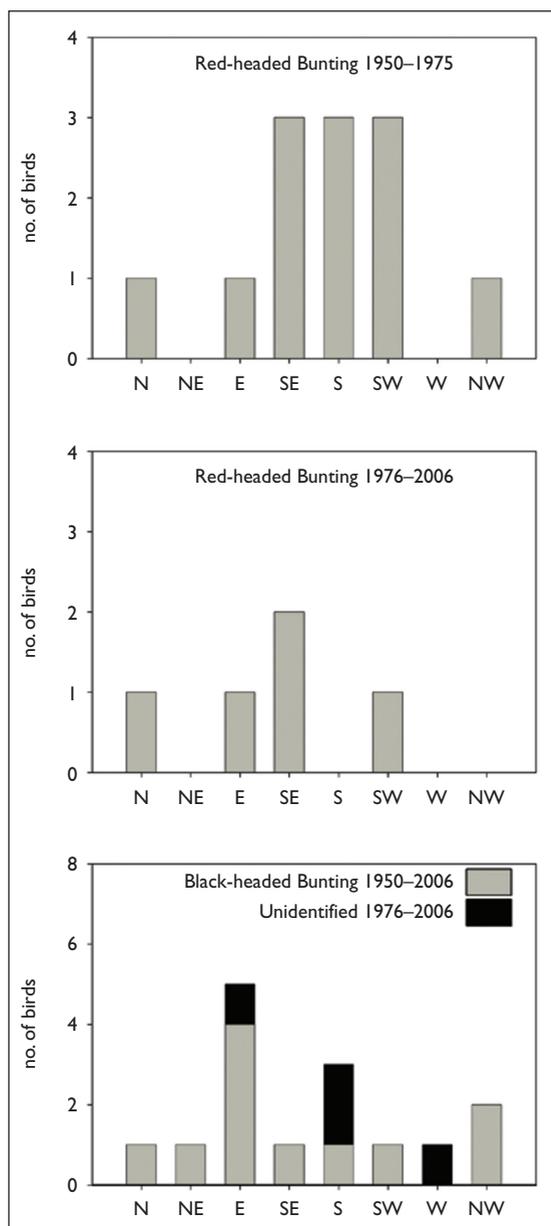


Fig. 3. Records of Red-headed Bunting *Emberiza bruniceps*, Black-headed Bunting *E. melanocephala* and unidentified Red-headed or Black-headed Buntings on Helgoland, Germany, since 1950 related to wind direction. Wind direction information taken from early morning data supplied by http://www.dwd.de/de/FundE/Klima/KLIS/daten/online/nat/index_tageswerte.htm

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