

BIRD TO WATCH

Jankowski's Bunting *Emberiza jankowskii*: the next species to become extinct in east Asia?

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Breeding populations of Jankowski's Bunting *Emberiza jankowskii* have been in decline for many years. Formerly fairly widespread in suitable habitat in south-east Heilongjiang and Jilin provinces of north-east China, southern Primorye, Far East Russia, and the People's Republic of Korea (DPRK), there are currently at best only a handful of known sites. With the population in Russia now thought to be extinct, and the status of the small population in the DPRK indeterminate, China now offers the only accessible areas in which to see this species. Of those areas listed by BirdLife in their Jankowski's Bunting factsheet (Birdlife International 2009), only one, Tumiji (alternatively spelt Tumuji) definitely retains a very small population. One other, Dagang Forestry, which held a population of around 15 pairs up until 2006, has not been surveyed since, whilst a report of 43 individuals at Keerqin, almost certainly refers to Meadow Bunting *Emberiza cioides* (pers. obs., Jesper Hornskov *in litt.*).

In early May of this year I made two visits to the Tumiji site, as part of a group led by Jesper Hornskov. Over the last two years Jesper has witnessed very worrying trends at this site, due to forage-harvesting of the bunting's mixed grassland and Siberian Apricot *Armeniaca sibirica* habitat. At the time of our visit, only approximately 1 km² of this habitat remained, and further harvesting is expected, probably before the end of this year. Within this area it was estimated that seven Jankowski's Buntings survived.

Efforts are now being made to promote management of this precious habitat in a sustainable manner, and allow recently cut areas to recover. Harvesting has left roots of the Siberian Apricot intact, and if fenced off these areas would naturally regenerate. Clearly there is also a need for greater awareness both locally and internationally of the very real plight of the species. There is hope, but action is needed now.

Plate 1. Jankowski's Bunting *Emberiza jankowskii* at Tumiji, May 2010.





Plate 2. View across remaining Jankowski's Bunting *Emberiza jankowskii* habitat, Tumiji, with Siberian Apricot bush in foreground, May 2010.

BirdLife International has recently upgraded the status of Jankowski's Bunting to Endangered (Stuart Butchart pers. comm.). However, it is acknowledged that this upgrade is based on very limited information, and Critically Endangered would seem more appropriate, and would facilitate the urgent action that is needed.

The accompanying photographs were taken under some duress. The reserve staff, now embarrassed by the effects of forage-harvesting on the habitat they are charged with protecting, have attempted to ban cameras at the site.

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Reference

BirdLife International (2009) Species factsheet: *Emberiza jankowskii*.
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