

**PROPOSAL FOR INCLUSION OF SPECIES ON THE APPENDICES OF THE  
CONVENTION ON THE CONSERVATION OF MIGRATORY SPECIES OF  
WILD ANIMALS**

**A. PROPOSAL:** Listing the entire population of *Emberiza aureola* on Appendix I

**B. PROPONENT:** Government of Mongolia

**C. SUPPORTING STATEMENT:**

**1. Taxon**

- |            |                        |  |
|------------|------------------------|--|
| <b>1.1</b> | <b>Classis:</b>        | Aves   |
| <b>1.2</b> | <b>Ordo:</b>           | Passeriformes  |
| <b>1.3</b> | <b>Familia:</b>        | Emberizidae  |
| <b>1.4</b> | <b>Species:</b>        | <i>Emberiza aureola</i>                                      |
| <b>1.5</b> | <b>Common name(s):</b> | Yellow-breasted Bunting, Bruant aureole, Escribano aureolado |

**2. Biological data**

**2.1 Distribution**

The entire population of this species is migratory. It breeds in Finland, Russia, Belarus, Ukraine, Kazakhstan, China, Mongolia, and Japan. It winters in southern China, Nepal, India, Bangladesh, Myanmar, Thailand, Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam.

**2.2 Population**

A population estimate for the whole population does not seem to have been made. A 2004 estimate for Europe was 20,000 to 100,000 pairs. The same study reported that the stronghold population in Russia declined markedly during 1990-2000, and that the overall trend in Europe was considered to be one of moderate decline (more than 10%). It was formerly one of the most abundant breeding passerines across vast swathes of Siberia, but, although it remains common in some regions, and although there have been no systematic surveys, a severe decline has been noted in most breeding areas and it has completely disappeared from parts of its former breeding range over the last twenty years. No birds have bred in Finland in the last three years, and in Kazakhstan its range has contracted northwards by 300 km over the last 15 years. It has declined rapidly in Russia both in the Moscow and Baikal Regions, and severe declines have recently been noted in Hokkaido, Japan and Mongolia. The "swarms" formerly seen at well-studied migration watch-points such as Beidaihe, China, have not occurred recently. Numbers at sites throughout its wintering range have also shown rapid declines over the last twenty years. In 2008, IUCN uplisted the global conservation status of the species to Vulnerable.

### 2.3 Habitat

It breeds in wet meadows with tall vegetation and scattered scrub, riverside thickets and secondary scrub. It winters in large flocks in cultivated areas, rice fields and grasslands, preferring scrubby dry-water rice fields for foraging and reedbeds for roosting.

### 2.4 Migrations

In the autumn, birds stop over in large numbers to moult in the Yangtze Valley, China before continuing to their winter quarters. The bird is somewhat subject to vagrancy, with small numbers appearing annually in Western Europe in the autumn migration period.

## 3. **Threat data**

### 3.1 Direct threat

This bird is hunted when on migration, and especially at its wintering sites. Most notably, roosting flocks are caught in reedbeds, using mist-nets. The birds are then commonly cooked and sold, often as a snack-food. This practice was formerly restricted to South China, but has reportedly become more widespread owing to increased affluence in the region. Hunters, it is said, now have to travel more widely to find sufficient birds. In China, male birds of this species are killed, stuffed and sold as mascots, since their presence in the home is thought to confer happiness. On migration and in the wintering grounds, at least locally, birds are also trapped for "merit release" in temples. Since many populations on pristine breeding grounds have dropped rapidly, the decline is considered likely to have been driven by this heavy trapping.

### 3.2 Habitat destruction

Agricultural intensification, the shift to irrigated rice production and consequent loss of winter stubble have reduced the quality and quantity of wintering habitat, and the loss of reedbeds has reduced the number of available roost sites. In parts of the breeding range, there has been a reduction in habitat quality, including drying of meadows caused by changes in the flow pattern of rivers, a result of dam construction upstream.

### 3.3 Indirect threat

None known.

### 3.4 Threats connected especially with migrations

The large assemblages of birds on migration make them especially vulnerable to hunting (see Direct threats above).

### 3.5 National and international utilisation

Utilisation for food and other purposes is well demonstrated in China, and may occur in other Range States. There is no formal international utilisation.

#### **4. Protection status and needs**

##### **4.1 National protection status**

The bird is protected in its breeding range. Its status elsewhere is unclear, but at least some of the trapping referred to above is believed to be illegal at the national level. Where laws protecting the species do exist, it is likely that enforcement will be problematical in at least some cases.

##### **4.2 International protection status**

The species is not listed on Appendix II of the CMS.

##### **4.3 Additional protection needs**

A programme of co-ordinated monitoring is needed to determine the magnitude of the decline of this species. This should ideally be done at breeding, passage and wintering sites. The demand for the species as a snack-food and as a mascot needs to be reduced; the enactment of legislation and its enforcement are one approach; another is through education, and awareness campaigns. On the wintering grounds, sites that still hold large numbers of the species should be given protected status. Research leading to a better understanding of the bird's requirements at these sites would help to enable the protection and management of the most appropriate areas.

#### **5. Range States<sup>1</sup>**

BANGLADESH, BELARUS, Cambodia, China, FINLAND, INDIA, Japan, KAZAKHSTAN, Laos, MONGOLIA, Nepal, Russian Federation, Thailand, UKRAINE, Viet Nam.

#### **6. Comments from Range States**

#### **7. Additional remarks**

#### **8. References**

BirdLife International (2004) *Birds in Europe: population estimates, trends and conservation status*. Cambridge, UK: BirdLife International.

BirdLife website: <http://www.birdlife.org.datazone/species/index.html> accessed 19<sup>th</sup> June 2008.

---

<sup>1</sup> CMS Parties in capitals.

