

However, the circumstances of the record were felt to be sufficiently indicative of the bird being a natural vagrant rather than an escapee, a decision doubtless supported by the presence of a 1st-winter bird in Spain five days earlier and another on North Ronaldsay a year later (Foster 2006).

Expected as a visitor to our shores since 1975, it is perhaps surprising that it took so long to occur. Unfortunately neither of the British records chose to linger for long. However, the recent run of extreme rare far-eastern vagrants raises expectations for additional records in due course.

Red-flanked Bluetail *Tarsiger cyanurus*



Ray Scally

(Pallas, 1773). A small population persists in north-east Finland. Main range in cool temperate forests of northern Eurasia from eastern Russia and Siberia to Kamchatka, northern Japan and northeast China. Winters southern China, Taiwan and southern Japan, through southeast Asia to northern peninsula Thailand.

Polytypic, two subspecies. European records are attributable to nominate *cyanurus* (Pallas, 1773) of northern Eurasia. Extralimital *rufilatus* (Hodgson, 1845) occurs from Afghanistan to north-central China. The subspecies differ diagnostically in size, plumage and vocalisations (Martens and Eck 1995) and may form two monotypic species (Knox *et al* 2008): Red-flanked Bluetail *Tarsiger cyanurus* and Himalayan Bluetail *T. rufilatus*. Distinct features include the longer tail and tarsus and more rounded wing-tip of *rufilatus*. Adult male *rufilatus* has brighter blue upperparts, paler blue supercilium (usually without white to the front) and narrower and more pure white throat patch than *cyanurus*. Females and immature males of two forms similar, but *rufilatus* averages whiter throat and belly (BWP)

Rare but increasingly regular vagrant from northeast Europe or Siberia, mostly in autumn.

Status: Formerly one of the most eagerly sought after Sibes at the time of the first twitchable mainland bird in Dorset in 1993, since when it has almost been annual. There have been 48 records, all of which have been in Britain; one in 2007 was the first for Wales.

Historical review: Although no longer the great rarity it once was, this beautiful species can still entice an approving crowd. This is yet another dream Sibe that has made the descent rapidly from a species that most could only ever fantasise about to one that is firmly on the radar for self-finders.