

(2008) photographed the species at Naggar, Kullu District, during November 2008. Dhadwal (2019) recorded it once during March 2016 at the Forest Training Institute and Rangers College, Sundernagar, Mandi District. Bhattacharya (2020) saw three individuals foraging near human habitation on 02 February 2020 at Upper Barol, Kangra District. The prominent black patch on the ear coverts was well seen. These three records provide further evidence of the presence of the Eurasian Tree Sparrow in Himachal Pradesh.

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Finn's Weaver *Ploceus megarhynchus* breeding on *Ipomoea* reeds, Kumaon, Uttarakhand

Of the four species of weavers (Ploceidae) found in India, Finn's Weaver *Ploceus megarhynchus* is the most restricted in range, and least known. It was rediscovered in the Kumaon Terai by Dr Sálím Ali in 1959 and now it is listed as globally Vulnerable due to loss of habitat and trapping (BirdLife International 2020; Craig 2020). Distributed very locally in the lower terai, from the plains to 1,300 m, it is an endemic bird of India and Nepal, with two subspecies, the nominate found in Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand, and western Nepal, and *salimalii* found in West Bengal and Assam (Bhargava 2017). The population at one of the main sites, Udham Singh Nagar District, Uttarakhand, has declined by 84–96% over the last 20 years (Bhargava 2017; SoIB 2020). Here we describe recent observations of the breeding of Finn's Weaver on *Ipomea* sp., reeds along with a few past observations from



146. Male and putative female Finn's Weavers on 12 October 2014.

the Haripura-Baur Reservoir (29.15°N, 79.25°E; c.240 m asl), situated in the terai belt of Udham Singh Nagar District. These are adjacent reservoirs spread over an area of 295 sq. km, created by two earthen embankment dams of Baur and Haripura, built on the Bhakra, Baur, and Kakrala rivers (Ahmed et al. 2019).

Bhargava conducted surveys at Haripura Reservoir in 2002, but did not report any Finn's Weavers (Bhargava 2017). However, he saw three Finn's Weavers on *Typha* reeds at Baur Dam in July 2013, along with Streaked Weavers *P. manyar* and other *Munia Lonchura* sp. (Bhargava 2017). Ash photographed Finn's Weavers at Baur Reservoir on 05 October 2014 (Ash 2014), when he saw eight to ten birds amongst other weavers. RP has been regularly visiting this site since 2014, in search of Finn's Weaver, but spotted it only on five occasions till 2019. RP's first sighting was on 12 October 2014 when he was guiding a group of bird photographers, and suddenly came across a flock of three weavers near Baur Reservoir that were bigger than the Baya Weaver *P. philippinus*. The male was quite similar to a Baya Weaver in breeding plumage, except that it had less black, but brighter yellow [146]. The birds in this flock, a male and two females, were perched on kans grass *Saccharum spontaneum*. Though the females were not clear in the photograph, the male was identified definitively as a Finn's Weaver while the females were most likely of that species. Subsequently, more searches by RP and SP yielded two birds in non-breeding plumage on 22 December 2015, perched on *Lantana* at the same site, along with a mixed flock of Black-breasted- *P. benghalensis* and Baya Weavers. Their bigger size and massive bill helped us to identify them [147]. On 11 July 2016, RP spotted another male in breeding plumage at Haripura Reservoir, but could not photograph it. This individual was carrying some food in his bill, which was the first indication that it was probably nesting in the vicinity. In 2016, a team of bird trappers also reported 10–12 Finn's Weavers from Baur Reservoir (Bhargava 2017). In July 2017, Bhargava heard several distant calls of Finn's Weavers at Haripura Reservoir and recommended confirmation of breeding



147. Finn's Weavers in non-breeding plumage. 22 December 2015.



148. Finn's Weaver in non-breeding plumage on 23 December 2019.

and monitoring through boat surveys (Bhargava 2017). A flock of nine non-breeding birds, seen by RP on 30 November 2017, resting on an electric line near Haripura Reservoir was flushed by a Eurasian Marsh Harrier *Circus aeruginosus* before a photo could be taken. RP was able to recognize these birds by big size and massive bills through binoculars. In August 2019, RP, SP, DR, AR, and Saravanan Janakarajan surveyed Baigul Dam, situated near Sitarganj town (Udham Singh Nagar District, Uttarakhand), and the Baur-Haripura Reservoir area including some nearby villages for breeding sites of Finn's Weaver, without results. However, on 23 December 2019, RP and Ashish Pradhan again spotted an individual in non-breeding plumage, feeding very close to a small human settlement at the beginning of Baur Reservoir, within a flock of c.300 of Black-breasted Weavers [148].

On 21 June 2020, RP, SP, DR, and AR started searching for Finn's Weaver from the point where RP spotted the non-breeding individual in December 2019 till the end of Haripura Reservoir. The team was about to abandon the area at 1000 h, due to scorching heat, when suddenly RP pointed out a weaver in the reed beds, which had a bright yellow belly, without any black on throat, and was big in size [149]. Though it gave some opportunity for photo documentation, it flew away along with the flock of Black-breasted Weavers. Very soon, 14 birds came into the grass, allowing us to photograph both male and female birds. However, harsh weather conditions forced the team to retreat and return on another day. On 23 June 2020, the team went directly to the same spot, amidst the first monsoon rains. The birds were present at 0650 h, and were carrying nesting material from munj grass *Saccharum munja* to the reed beds, though no nest could be seen. The birds, along with Black-breasted Weavers, were feeding on nearby paddy [150]. After the rain stopped at 1150 h, RP followed a bird carrying nesting material and spotted 26 individuals on c.25 nests of Finn's Weaver on

Ipomea reeds [151–154]. Males were defending territories and aggressively lunging at each other. They raised and spread their wings, uttering high-pitched calls, and doing a rapid wing beating display [Video 1] while a few females were also there [155]. Subsequently, RP & SP visited the site eight more times and made detailed observations (Table 1). We have also gone through the guidelines for nesting biology studies (Barve et al. 2020) and state, specifically, that it was not possible to either closely study or disturb the nesting colony due to its unique location in the middle of water, all through the study period. This colony was surrounded by water and was c.50 m away from earthen boundary of the dam. To avoid further disturbances to the colony, we did not venture closer in a boat.



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149. Finn's Weaver male on 21 June 2020.



150. Finn's Weaver feeding on paddy crop on 22 June 2020.



151. Nesting colony in the middle of water.



Video 1. Breeding display of Finn's Weavers.



152. Nests of Finn's Weaver.

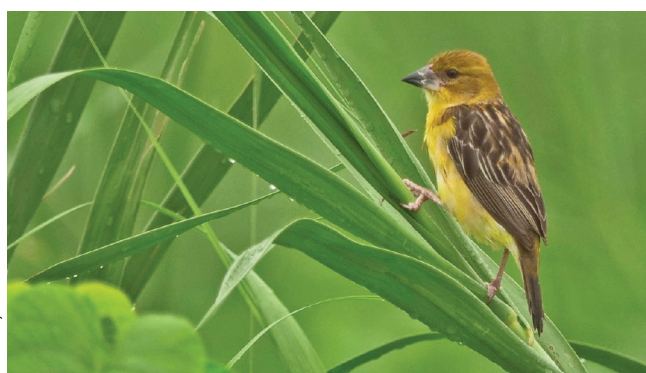
All: Sheela Panwar

Table 1. Details of breeding of Finn's Weaver in 2020

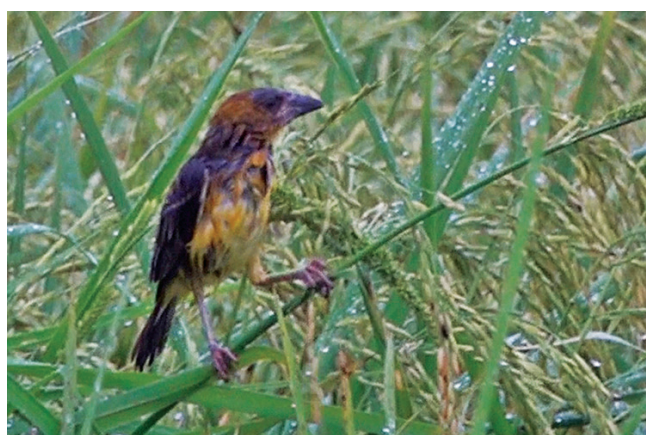
S. No.	Date of observation	No. of Nests	No. of Individuals	Remark
1.	23 June 2020	29	26	Saw nesting colony for the first time. It has 15 complete nests, four composite nests (comprising two nests linked together), and ten under construction
2.	27 June 2020	29	23	Birds were feeding on paddy in adjacent fields, in mixed flock with Streaked- and Black-breasted Weavers
3.	02 July 2020	29	26	Birds were carrying nesting material and defending their nests by lunging at each other
4.	03 July 2020	37	26	Today located few more nests in another patch of <i>Ipomea</i>
5.	04 July 2020	37	15	Paddy harvesting underway, but a few birds were still feeding on paddy grains
6.	05 July 2020	37	15	—Ditto—
7.	13 July 2020	37	14	Birds were busy maintaining their nests and territorial displays
8.	30 July 2020	26	9	Paddy had been harvested, so birds were not coming to this area and only nine individuals were seen at some of nests of the colony. Some of the older nests were missing on <i>Ipomea</i>
9.	19 August 2020	26	3	Only three female birds were around nests. No sign of chicks, but birds were going in and out of the nests and feeding on insects from the water's surface



153. Finn's Weaver male in breeding plumage on 22 June 2020.



154. Finn's Weaver female in breeding plumage on 22 June 2020.



155. Finn's Weaver female on 22 June 2020.

Finn's Weaver has been reported to breed on silk cotton *Bombax ceiba* and shisham *Dalbergia Sissoo*, apart from banyan *Ficus bengalensis*, Indian coral Tree *Erythrina*, mango *Mangifera indica*, flame of the forest *Butea monosperma*, and udal [elephant rope tree] *Sterculia villosa* (Ambedkar 1969; Bhargava 2017). Ali & Crook (1960) reported nests from reeds but alluded at the possibility that those were practice nests made by first year males. Saha (1967) reported them breeding in reeds standing in one meter of water at Kolkata. Finn's Weavers have been reported to breed in *Typha* reeds, specifically during the second

breeding season in Kumaon (Ambedkar 1969), though this has not been reported since then (Bhargava 2017). Though it has been reported to be resting and roosting on *Ipomea* (Bhargava 2017), ours is probably the first report of its breeding on *Ipomea* reeds. Residents of the area are cultivating water chestnut in these waters, and fishing is also a common activity in the area. Human disturbance could be a possible threat for the birds to leave the colony as we noticed some fishermen fishing very close to the colony during the course of our observations. Our reports from 2014, till date, confirm that a breeding population of c.25 birds occur at this site and it appears to be one of the last few remaining sites for the nominate subspecies in India.

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Oriental Pied Hornbill *Anthracoceros albirostris* in Visakhapatnam city, Andhra Pradesh

At 0730 h on 29 February 2020, UJ spotted two female Oriental Pied Hornbills in the Kailasagiri Hills, Visakhapatnam (= Vizag), Andhra Pradesh, being mobbed by a flock of crows (*Corvus* sp.). They were perched on top a Banyan tree *Ficus bengalensis* in the Kailasagiri Hill Top Park (17.74°N, 83.34°E), which is a famous tourist destination. The pair was first found perched on a huge banyan tree, from where they moved on to the nearby trees