On 05 May 2025, three Black Drongos *Dicrurus macrocercus* were observed near the weaver colony. Among them was a pair that nested at a height of four m above ground level on the earlier-abandoned *Premna bengalensis* tree, raising three fledglings, while another drongo frequently perched and roosted on the *Vitex* tree holding the active Finn's Weaver colony. No aggression or nest usurpation was observed. Notably, no avian predators were seen during the monitoring period.

This observation supports earlier suggestions (Ali & Crook 1959; Bhargava 2000; Craig 2020) that Finn's Weavers may benefit from nesting near drongo territories, likely a form of commensalism in which weavers gain protection from the drongo's vigilant and territorial behaviour. While Bhargava (2017) provides extensive observations on the breeding biology of the Finn's Weaver and reports associations with drongos in the nominate subspecies, we found no documentation of such nesting associations in the 'Eastern' Finn's Weavers. Our record may therefore represent the first such confirmation for this subspecies, given the limited breeding documentation.

The Finn's Weaver has a disjunct distribution: the western population, occurs in the Terai grasslands of Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand, whereas the eastern populations occur in Assam (Ali & Ripley 1999; Abdulali 1961; Bhargava 2000; Praveen 2025). The species is threatened by habitat degradation, particularly the loss of seasonally flooded grasslands, and by anthropogenic pressures, including grazing, encroachment, and pet trade. Their relatively short, tubeless nests make them more susceptible to predation (Ali & Crook 1959; Ambedkar 1968), underscoring the potential importance of secure, predator-free nesting environments, such as those near aggressive species, such as the Black Drongo.

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Distasteful butterfly in the diet of the White-capped Redstart *Phoenicurus leucocephalus*

Members of the family Muscicapidae are primarily insectivorous, though some species also feed on spiders, molluscs and sometimes seeds and fruits. The White-capped Redstart *Phoenicurus leucocephalus*, a species belonging to Muscicapidae family, has a wide distributional range, occurring from eastern Uzbekistan, south-western Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan east through Himalayas, to Bangladesh, Myanmar, China, Laos, Thailand, and Vietnam (Collar 2020). Its diet usually consists of insects (mayflies, craneflies, beetles, ants), spiders, and molluscs, and occasionally berries and grass seeds (Buckton & Ormerod 2008; Collar 2020).

In nature, birds act as significant predators of butterflies, and several species of birds have been reported to feed on butterflies (Marshall 1909; Orr 2013; Pinheiro & Cintra 2017). Butterflies of the tribe Troidini (family Papilionidae), tribes Acraeini, Danainae, Ithomiinae, and Heliconiinae (Nymphalidae), and some species of genus *Delias* (Pieridae) are generally avoided by birds due to their distastefulness (Rothschild et al. 1970; Bowers 1980; Kunte 2000). Experimental studies show that some birds may eat distasteful butterflies such as the Monarch Butterfly *Danaus Plexippus* (Petersen 1964), and a few wild observations exist, such as *Dicrurus* spp. feeding on *Euploea midamus* (Dannainae) in Java (Marshall 1909), White-breasted Woodswallow *Artamus leucoryn* taking *Tirumala hamata* in Australia (Ford & Ford 1993), and Black-backed Orioles *Icterus abeillei* and Black-headed Grosbeaks *Pheucticus melanocephalus* predating the Monarch Butterfly in Mexico (Fink & Brower 1981). However, such records remain scarce especially from tropical Asia.

During a faunal survey in Raimona National Park, Assam, India on 29 December 2024, at 1310 h, a solitary White-capped Redstart was seen along the edge of Pekua River (26.723°N, 90.052°E) **[65]**. The bird was foraging on the rocks, about 2–3 m from the stream, when it suddenly made a short flight and captured a butterfly. After catching it, the bird tossed the butterfly a few times, dropped it on the ground, then picked it up again and swallowed it whole within two minutes. The whole observation was photographed **[66]** which allowed the identification of the butterfly as a Blue-Spotted Crow *Euploea cf. midamus*, a member of Dannainae, also known as milkweed butterflies (Kehimkar 2016). The known larval host plants of *Euploea* butterflies are primarily the species of *Strophanthus* and *Nerium* which are well-known for their toxicity (Robinson et al. 2023). The adult butterflies obtain the toxic cardenolides through their larval host plants, which are responsible for the distastefulness and aposematic nature.

Photo: Arajush Payra

65. Site in Raimona National Park, Assam, where a White-capped Redstart was documented swallowing a *Euploea cf. midamus*.

All photos: Arajush Payra

66. White-capped Redstart swallowing a *Euploea cf. midamus* in Raimona National Park, Assam, India.

Birds usually consume butterflies by detaching the wings prior to ingesting the body, but in some species, such as Rainbow Bee-eater *Merops ornatus* the entire butterfly is swallowed (Orr 2013). In our observation, the White-capped Redstart also consumed the butterfly whole. While several redstarts like Black Redstart *P. ochruros*, White-winged Redstart *P. erythrogastrus*, Common Redstart *P. phoenicurus*, and Plumbeous Redstart *P. fuliginosus* are known to consume adult Lepidoptera, no previous account of butterflies or moths as diet of the White-capped Redstart exists. This constitutes the first documented record of a Lepidopteran prey item, and notably a distasteful butterfly, in the species' diet. This finding highlights the need for further studies to monitor the prey preferences of White-capped Redstart in Raimona National Park, where several butterfly species are usually seen mudpuddling along the river bed.

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The Whinchat *Saxicola rubetra* in Spiti, Himachal Pradesh, India

The Whinchat *Saxicola rubetra* is a slim, long-distance migrant chat that breeds across Europe and western Asia and winters in sub-Saharan Africa (Urquhart & Bowley 2010; Clement & Rose 2015). Measuring about 12–14 cm, male Whinchat is notable for its rufous-ochre throat and breast during the breeding season (Collar & Garcia 2020). The species typically uses open habitats with scattered shrubs, low herb cover, and exposed perches for foraging and songposts (Collar & Garcia 2020).

CA led a short faunal survey to the high-altitude landscapes of the Spiti Valley, accompanied by DO and AJ. The team explored key habitats around Kibber, Tashigang, Langza, and the Spiti River valley. The Spiti Valley is a Trans-Himalayan landscape and lies in north-eastern Himachal Pradesh. The region has a cold and semi-arid climate, with winter temperatures dropping below -30°C. Due to these harsh conditions, dwarf shrubs dominate the vegetation in Spiti, with *Caragana versicolor* being the principal species (Iyengar et al. 2017). Along the Spiti River and its tributaries, patches of taller scrub, including Sea Buckthorn *Hippophae* sp., Tamarisk *Tamarix* sp., and trees, mainly *Poplus* sp., Salix sp., support noticeably higher bird density and diversity.

On 13 June 2025, while surveying one such scrub patch near the Spiti River close to Kaza (32.212°N, 78.074°E; *c*.3,595 m asl), we observed a small bird resembling the Siberian Stonechat *S. maurus* but distinguished by a prominent white supercilium. The head was blackish with brownish streaking and the cheeks were brownish-black having a prominent, short, white moustachial stripe. These were bordered above by a broad whitish supercilium and below by broad white bands, which were meeting at chin in front and extending posteriorly to the nape. The throat, breast, and sides of belly were orange-buff, while the centre of belly and vent were much paler. The back was brownish with dark centres to the feathers, which were forming streaks at some places and spotting at others. The primary projection was long, and the wings were black, having white alula and white patch over dark wing coverts. The outer tail feathers were white. By these features, CA identified it as a male Whinchat in typical breeding plumage **[67, 68]**. The next day it was searched extensively in the same patch, but we couldn't find it again.

67. Male Whinchat showing bold white supercilium, orange-buff throat, breast and sides of belly and paler central belly and vent.

68. Whinchat showing long primary projection and a brownish back with dark centres to the feathers.

Both photos: C. Abhinav

The Whinchat is globally widespread but extremely rare in the Indian subcontinent. Rasmussen & Anderton (2012) listed the species as 'hypothetical' for South Asia. It was added to the Indian subcontinent checklist only after a confirmed sighting from Udawalawe National Park, Sri Lanka on 08 February 2015 (Steiof et al. 2017). Records from India remain very few and are summarised in Table 1.

Most birds breeding north of the Tibetan-Himalayan region follow an indirect, westerly migration route through central and south-western Asia to winter in Africa, in preference to the shorter, but more arduous route through the mountain barrier of the Tibetan-Himalayan massif. However, a significant number of migratory birds do pass through or over these mountain ranges (Delany et al. 2017). In the Southampton University Ladakh Expeditions, long-distance passage migrant passerines made up only a small proportion of the total catch (2.1%), yet they represented the widest species diversity among all categories of migrants, comprising 39% of the species trapped (Delany et al. 2014). This group included several rarities and more