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Cover: *Saproamanita praeclara*: Sporocarp in habitat © Kantharaja. R.



Back after 40 years: a rare sighting of Eurasian Siskin *Spinus spinus* (Linnaeus, 1758) (Aves: Passeriformes: Fringillidae) in Himachal Pradesh, India

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The Eurasian Siskin *Spinus spinus* (Linnaeus, 1758) is a small and greenish-yellow finch, distributed largely in the westernmost and easternmost parts of Eurasia (Clement 2020). A vagrant species in India, it has been recorded only in four states so far, with the majority of records from Jammu & Kashmir. We report a very recent sighting of this species from Himachal Pradesh.

As part of a research project on flycatcher phenology in the Great Himalayan National Park Conservation Area (GHNPCA), PP (hereafter, 'the observer') conducts regular surveys in the region. During a reconnaissance survey for this research project, on 16 November 2021, he walked a narrow mountain path atop a ridge, adjacent to the village of Gushaini, which is within the ecozone of GHNPCA. He sighted a small passerine on the left side of the trail at 1157 h for ~20 seconds. The bird flew from

~52° north-east direction and perched on a low branch of a royal variety Apple tree *Malus domestica* less than two metres away, slightly below eye level, as a villager walked in the opposite direction of the observer, both near the bird. The bird visited the branch despite having sighted the two humans in the vicinity. This made it very easy to capture high-resolution pictures of the individual (Image 1). The bird may have been using the tree as a vantage point to assess the surroundings (Image 2). Soon, the bird moved to the top of an oak tree *Quercus* sp. ~20 m-tall in the centre of the ridge, approximately 10 m back in the direction the bird came from, after which the observer lost sight of the bird. Coordinates, elevation, and orientation were recorded using a Garmin Etrex 20x GPS with a pre-installed DEM layer for accuracy of elevation, and the photographs were taken using a

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Image 1. The male *Spinus spinus* seen in Gushaini.

Nikon D5600 with a 300 mm lens.

The observer immediately identified the bird as a male Eurasian Siskin *Spinus spinus* using a field guide (Grimmett et al. 2011). Shortly afterwards, he uploaded the sighting in a 20 minute eBird checklist made during that time. The identity was later confirmed using descriptions given in Clement (2020). No similar finch species has a black bib on the chin (Gaston & Chattopadhyaya 1980), the size of which is linked to their intraspecific dominance status and metabolic rates (Senar et al. 2000) and thus eliminating all other possibilities. Two subsequent visits to the same area (17 and 21 November 2021) did not yield any re-sighting of *S. spinus*. There are pine trees (*Pinus* sp.) nearby, which are known to be used by the species (Clement 2020).



Image 2. Habitat in which the individual was sighted. *Malus domestica* (Apple tree), the perch to the left.

Table 1. All sightings of *Spinus spinus* in India.

Date & time	No.	Sighting duration	Elevation (in m)	Observer	Sighting location	District	State	Sex
12.xi.2019; U	U	U	2,526	Imran Shah	Batura Lake, Passu, Gojal	Hunza	Jammu & Kashmir	F (&M?)
08.xi.2019; U	U	U	2,648	Imran Shah	Borit Lake	Hunza	Jammu & Kashmir	M (&F?)
*11.xi.2016; 1000 h	10	U; survey duration- 4 hours	2,648	Imran Shah	Borit Lake	Hunza	Jammu & Kashmir	F (&M?)
27.xi.2016; 0900 h	5	U; survey duration 5 hours	2,658	Imran Shah	Borit Lake	Hunza	Jammu & Kashmir	M(&F?)
01.iv.1995; 0600 h	1	U; survey duration 12 hours	2,309	Matti Rekilä	Karimabad/ Gilgit	Hunza	Jammu & Kashmir	U
01.xi.2021; 1312 h	4	3 min	1,588	Mohammad Arif khan	Srinagar	Srinagar	Jammu & Kashmir	F(&M?)
25.i.1980; 1330 h	1	~15 min	2,681	Tony Gaston & S. Chattopadhyaya	Solang Nalla	Kullu	Himachal Pradesh	M&F
16.xi.2021; 1157 h	1	~20 s	1,687	PP (this report)	Gushaini	Kullu	Himachal Pradesh	M
29.iv.2010– 04.v.2010; 0600–0800 h, 1100–1300 h, 1600–1800 h	≥ 1	U; survey duration- 10 min (multiple)	1,606, 1,948	**Utpal Singha Roy(?), Arijit Pal(?), Purbasha Banerjee(?) & some Masters student(s) (?)	Neora Valley National Park	Kalimpong	West Bengal	?
23.iv.2013; 1000 h	1	U; survey duration 8 hours	2,702	Craig Robson	Mandala Road (i.e., road from Dirang junction to Mandala village)	West Kameng	Arunachal Pradesh	M
07.iii.2017; 0530 h	5	U; survey duration 4 hours	2,475	Rofikul Islam	Eaglenest Wildlife Sanctuary	West Kameng	Arunachal Pradesh	M(&F?)

U—Unknown | M—Male | F—Female | ?—Unclear.

All records are from eBird except the current sighting, first sighting in Himachal Pradesh (also available on eBird), and those in West Bengal, which are from published literature. *—Two sightings on the same day (one under the ‘Historical’ protocol in eBird) in Borit Lake reported by the same person is being considered as one, because they are likely the same individual(s) | **—Roy et al. (2011). Authors were contacted for further details about the sightings, but they are currently too busy to check the raw data or don’t have access to the data. To avoid double-counting, it is assumed that the sightings in the two areas surveyed for the study have been during the same day. Hence, this is considered as one record.

We thoroughly searched several online platforms for previous sightings of this species within India. This included the following: published peer-reviewed and grey literature through academic search engines and simple query searches; citizen science platforms eBird, iNaturalist, and India Biodiversity Portal; and social online platforms Facebook (including dedicated bird groups), Instagram, Twitter, and Flickr. Two records were obtained from peer-reviewed publications. All other records were from eBird. The first and the latest sighting of the species within India has been in Himachal Pradesh, the first at Solang Nalla, which is around 109 km away (shortest distance, geodesic) from the current location (Image 3) (Gaston & Chattopadhyaya 1980). As Gaston & Chattopadhyaya (1980) had stated, the sightings of the species may have been overlooked because of the lack of surveys during winter, when they

are usually seen. The location of the current sighting was along a trail that is not used by birdwatchers, as it is high above but parallel to the main route to the entry gate of GHNP from Gushaini, which they do take. This trail is almost exclusively used by locals. The combined effect of birdwatchers surveying less in the area during the cold winters, and that too, restricted to some trails, may have resulted in the missing of some sightings between these past 40 years.

This is the second sighting of the species within India in 2021. The previous sighting was further north-west in Srinagar, only 15 days prior. The current sighting is highly significant for several reasons. There are only around 10 other records of this species within the Indian boundary (Table 1). In Himachal Pradesh, this is the first sighting of the species in 40 years, and only the second sighting in recorded history. Of all the sightings in the western

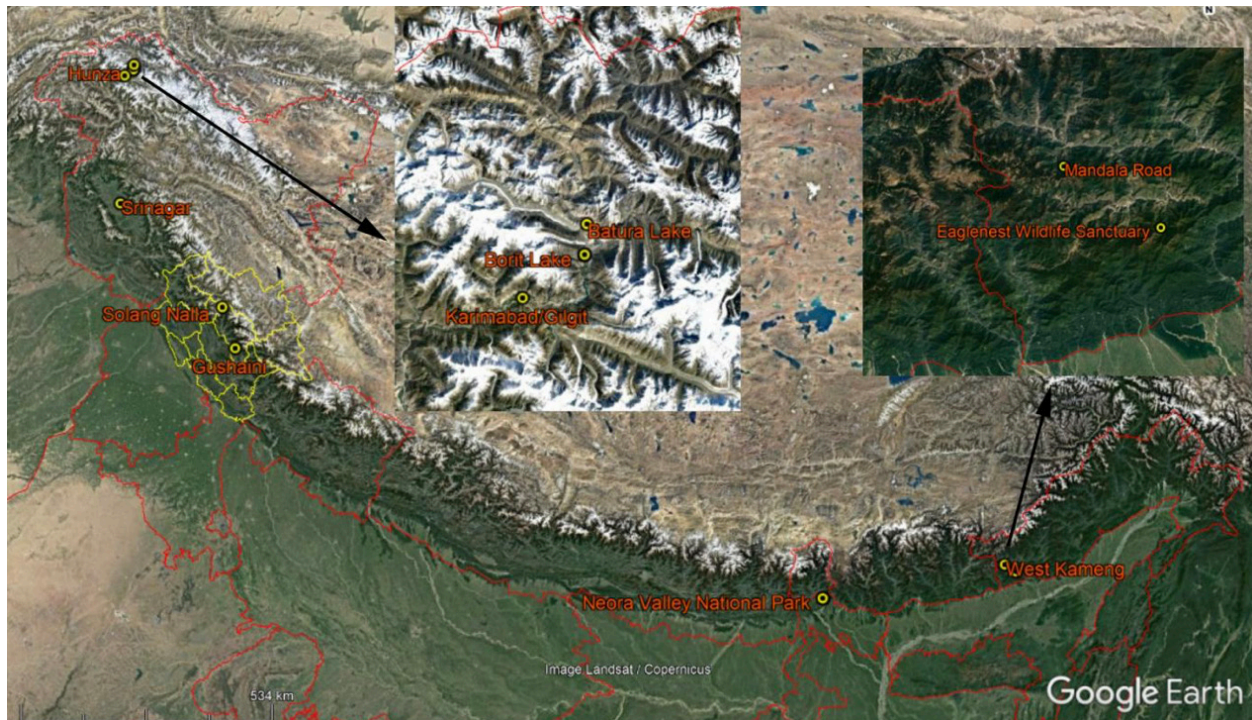


Image 3. Distribution of sightings of *Spinus spinus* in India (yellow and black dots). Himachal Pradesh and its districts are represented in yellow outline; and other states in red outline. Inset images show clustered records in Hunza and West Kameng districts.

Himalaya, this is the most southeastern. Both sightings were in low altitude sites compared to all previous sightings in western Himalaya with the difference in elevation exceeding a kilometre in some cases. *S. spinus* exhibit irruptive migration (variable patterns in north-to-south migrations) based on the availability of food and possibly climate change (Arnaiz-Villena et al. 2009; Kanerva et al. 2020). For this reason, it is important to keep a lookout for this species in the coming years, as it can show if their phenology during irruptive migrations is advancing, which may be correlated with advancing spring arrival dates as a result of climate change.

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