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Cover: Mixed media illustration of a Blue bird and Sunbird. © Lakshmi Niranjana.



First record of Scaly-breasted Munia *Lonchura punctulata* (Linnaeus, 1758) (Aves: Passeriformes: Estrildidae) from Kashmir, India

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Scaly-breasted Munia *Lonchura punctulata* is a small-sized bird from the family Estrildidae, commonly known as waxbills, grass finches, or the munia family. Scaly-breasted Munia is also sometimes referred to as Spotted Munia. This bird is indigenous to Asia with a broad geographic range, including India, China, Bangladesh, Afghanistan, Bhutan, Cambodia, Indonesia, Nepal, Singapore, Sri Lanka, Thailand, and Vietnam (Arigela et al. 2020; Bird Life International 2023). It has been introduced to Australia, Hawaii, Puerto Rico, Florida, Japan, and California. In Oahu and Hawaii this introduction has led to the establishment of wild populations that compete with other munia species, such as Tricolored Munias *Lonchura malacca*, which were also introduced at the same time (Moulton et al. 1992; Payne 2020). Scaly-breasted Munias live in wet and high grasslands, often with other munias. They eat grass seeds, berries, algae, and insects (Payne 2020). They roost in bushes, trees, and cycas plants. In southern India and Indonesia, they are considered crop pests.

Current literature reports Scaly-breasted Munia in Jammu province of the Union Territory of Jammu & Kashmir, India which is ecologically different from

Kashmir (Grimmet et al. 2011; Suhail et al. 2020). Here we present Scaly-breasted Munia from Kashmir province with photographic evidence (Image 1–4). During our field surveys, Scaly-breasted Munia, was observed at three locations, viz., Kaman post Uri, Salamabad Uri, and Ladoora area in Baramulla District along the river Jhelum (Image 5). Initially the bird was sighted at Kaman post (34.100°N & 74.022°E) on 2 September 2022, at 1022 h perching on the transmission wires. During a second visit on 17 June 2023 in the Salamabad area (34.095°N & 74.022°E), a flock of Scaly-breasted Munias was sighted at 1430 h near the hydropower project dam. The third sighting took place at the Ladoora (34.252°N & 74.401°E) area of Baramulla on 21 July 2023 at 1500 h. The bird was observed near a footbridge, perching on an electric wire, and feeding on grass. The first author is investigating riverine bird diversity, conducting comprehensive bird surveys in the area to identify, and document bird species. As munias are popular cage birds, the birds seen in Kashmir could be escapees. As munias have been successfully introduced in many countries, they are hardy enough to establish wild populations by the escaped birds from the cages.

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Image 1–2. Scaly-breasted Munia *Lonchura punctulata* at Kaman Post and Salamabad Uri, Baramulla, Kashmir. © Shazia Shafayat.



Image 3–4. Scaly-breasted Munia *Lonchura punctulata* at Ladoora, Baramulla, Kashmir. © Shazia Shafayat.

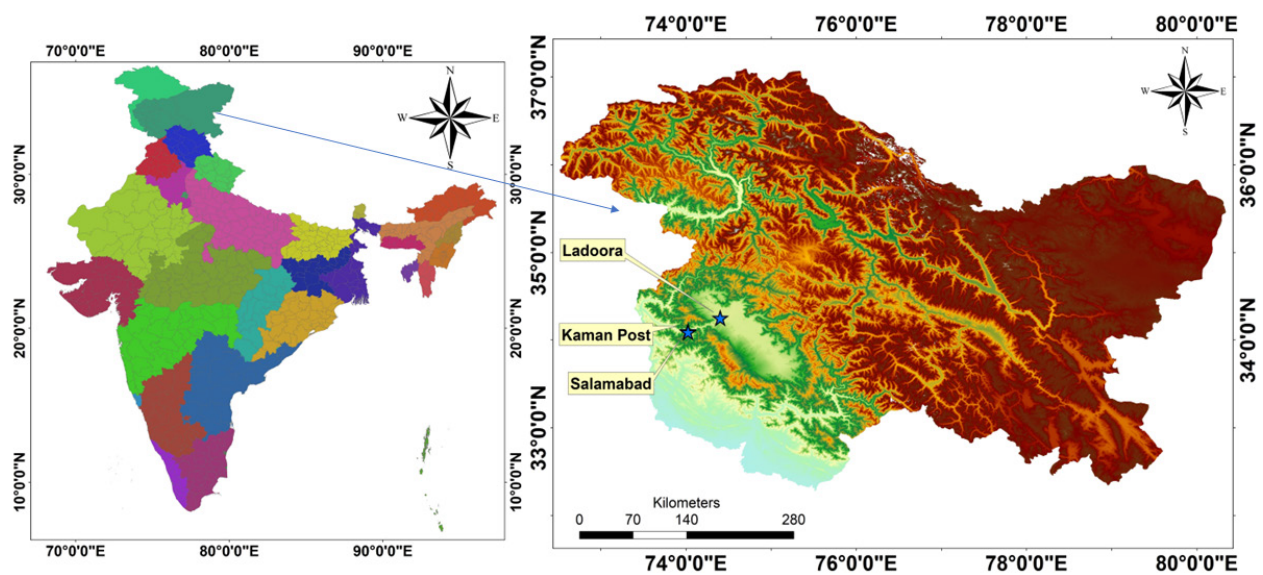


Image 5 . Map showing sighting locations of Scaly-breasted Munia in Kashmir, India.

Many times, people become tired of their pet birds and release them. Most do not survive, but many species (e.g., munias, parakeets, mynas) survive and establish wild populations.

The bird is characterized by its rich reddish-brown plumage, notably darker on the chin, and throat (Image 1–4). The breast and belly display a striking contrast, appearing white with black feather edges that create a scaled pattern which distinguishes the bird from other munias. The mantle, back, and wings exhibit a slightly paler and duller hue, adorned with subtle barring, and occasionally more prominent pale shaft streaks. The bird's eyes have a dark brown to brownish-red iris, the bill is blackish, and the lower mandible may exhibit a paler bluish-grey shade. The rump showcases distinctive dark brown and whitish or yellowish bars, while the upper tail coverts feature a subdued golden-yellow to orange-brown coloration. The species was identified using Grimmett et al. (2011).

The bird is a new member to the avifaunal diversity of Kashmir, India. There is limited scientific investigation

into the avian diversity inhabiting the northern Kashmir, which needs scientific attention in the form of intensive surveys.

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