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

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

**REFERENCES**


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ISSN 0974-7907 (Online) | ISSN 0974-7893 (Print)

April 2022 | Vol. 14 | No. 4 | Pages: 20811–20950
Date of Publication: 26 April 2022 (Online & Print)
DOI: 10.11609/jott.2022.14.4.20811-20950

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