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Cover: A digital art of water birds of Noyyal River and its wetlands in Coimbatore District by Megha A. Kashyap.



First photographic record of Brown Bullfinch *Pyrrhula nipalensis* (Aves: Passeriformes: Fringillidae) from Jammu & Kashmir, India

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Brown Bullfinch *Pyrrhula nipalensis* is a passerine bird in the family Fringillidae, class Aves, and order Passeriformes. The species has a mainly brown plumage; males tend to exhibit a slightly richer brown hue compared to the more subdued tones of females. This species is characterized by its stout, finch-like bill, which is well-suited for a diet primarily consisting of seeds (Grimmett et al. 2011).

A flock of five individuals was sighted through a camera trap installed in Butamali Tullail, a famous meadow for herders at an altitude of 3,400 m, 34.546388°N, 75.019806°E, on a northeastern aspect in a Betula forest. The flock was observed feeding on fallen Betula seeds on snow in October 2023. The species is known for its elusive and shy behaviour, often remaining hidden within dense foliage. It is typically observed foraging in pairs or small flocks, rarely straying far from cover. Brown Bullfinch primarily feeds on seeds, but its diet also includes berries and buds, which it forages from trees and shrubs. The birds were observed in 30 camera trap photographs and almost all the photographs were of foraging below the Betula trees. They used the Betula stump as a perch and were feeding on fallen seeds on ground. The trap was installed on a Betula tree.

The species has already been documented from Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Sikkim, Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Meghalaya, Manipur, Nagaland but has not previously been recorded from Jammu & Kashmir (Oommen et al. 2005; Praveen 2016; Sharma 2020). This study documents the first photographic evidence of the species from Jammu & Kashmir.

Brown Bullfinch thrives in dense, temperate forests, favouring mixed woodlands, and coniferous forests. Rhododendron thickets are particularly favoured, providing ample cover and abundant food resources (Ali & Ripley 1983; Rasmussen & Anderton 2005). These habitats offer a variety of seeds, berries, and buds—the primary components of the Brown Bullfinch's diet. The dense foliage also provides excellent nesting sites and protection from predators.

Brown Bullfinch is currently classified as 'Least Concern' by the IUCN Red List, indicating that it is not at immediate risk of significant population decline. In Gurez, people are more dependent on forests than in other parts of Jammu & Kashmir. The houses are primarily made of wood to provide better insulation during winter, when temperatures drop to around minus 10°C. Additionally, they rely on wood-based cooking

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Image 1. Brown Bullfinch *Pyrrhula nipalensis* photographed in Betula Forest, Butamali Gurez, Jammu & Kashmir.

and heating appliances during the colder months. Deforestation for urban development of tourist spots and logging for house construction are primary concerns that could impact the availability of suitable habitats for this species. However, ongoing habitat destruction and fragmentation due to the newly road construction in border area of valley also pose potential threats to the species. Conservation efforts should focus on protecting and preserving the temperate forests of the Himalayan region to ensure the long-term survival of the Brown Bullfinch. *Betula* serves as a crucial food source for the species during winter as recorded from camera trap photographs. Therefore, any climate impacts on *Betula* may also significantly affect the bullfinch's habitat.

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