

A REPORT ON FINN'S WEAVER

Introduction:

Finn's Weaver *Ploceus megarhynchus* (Hume, 1869) belongs to Order Passeriformes and Family Ploceidae. This species is classified as vulnerable on the IUCN Red List due to its small, rapidly declining and severely fragmented population as a result of the loss and degradation of Terai grasslands, principally through conversion to agriculture and overgrazing. An estimated population of 2,500-9,999 mature individuals were recorded (Bird Life International, 2018).

Finn's Weaver is found only in the Indian subcontinent; Uttarakhand, Kaziranga in Assam and Shuklaphanta region in Nepal. Finn's Weaver has two recognized subspecies; *Ploceus megarhynchus megarhynchus* in north India (Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand) and south west Nepal, and *Ploceus megarhynchus slimalii* in north east India (West Bengal and Assam).

This bird has a very patchy, small population in a few select places in the Indian subcontinent. Out of the four species of weavers (Ploceidae) found in India, Finn's Weaver *Ploceus megarhynchus* is the most restricted in range, and least known.

Uttarakhand has rich avian diversity about 710 species found in the state, 6 species are listed as "critically endangered" in the 'IUCN Red List of Threatened Species', 3 as "endangered", 19 as "vulnerable" and 28 as "near threatened". Ali and Crook (1959) and Ambedkar (1968) reported the breeding season of Finn's Weaver as occurring between May and September.

The Finn's Weaver or Yellow Weaver was first spotted in Uttarakhand in the 1950s by eminent ornithologist Dr Salim Ali. The bird, usually found in areas near agricultural fields or the Terai region, has seen a decline in population since the past few decades.

Finn's Weaver or Finn's Baya (*Ploceus megarhynchus*) builds nests on tops of trees or in reeds. According to ornithologists, they breed from May to September and line the inside of their nests, unlike other weaver birds. Finn's Weaver has been reported to breed on silk cotton *Bombax ceiba* and shisham *Dalbergia Sissoo*, apart from banyan *Ficus bengalensis*, Indian coral Tree *Erythrina*, mango *Mangifera indica*, flame of the forest *Butea monosperma*, and udal *Sterculia villosa* (Ambedkar 1969; Bhargava 2017).

Study Area:

This report presents nesting locations and status of Finn's Weaver observed in the Haripura-Baur Reservoir (29.11°N, 79.35°E; c.230 m asl), situated in the terai belt of Udham Singh Nagar District in June 2021. Regular visits were made to the nesting site at a time interval of four days for a month. The nesting sites were observed for 6 hours on an average. Photos and videos were captured during each visit. Apart from this, survey of entire Haripura dam and areas adjacent to it which had trees of Shisham and Semal was also done with the help of local people and forest officials. Information was also collected from the guard who was appointed by forest department to look after the nesting site.

Observations:

We describe recent observations of the breeding of Finn's Weaver on *Typha* sp., reeds and aim at finding newer information on this species. Some of the observations made are depicted in the table given below

S.No.	Date	Total Individuals	♂	♀	No. of Nests	Remarks
1.	05.06.2021	20	17	3	17	Saw nesting colony for the first time. It has 17 complete nests. The nest had a greater number of males than females.
2.	10.06.2021	23	13	10	17	Males of all weaver species perform wing-beating displays at nesting colonies, advertising songs to attract females.
3.	15.06.2021	0	0	0	15	There has been no rain for a long period and the area has all dried up.
4.	16.06.2021	0	0	0	11	There has been no rain for a long period and the area has all dried up.
5.	20.06.2021	4	2	2	11	Streaked Weavers were actively participating in nest making while Finn's weaver were just seen once or twice sitting on the nests for few secs.
6.	24.06.2021	3	3	0	10	Finns Weaver were sitting on Ipomoea away from their nests.
7.	28.06.2021	0	0	0	6	Most of the nests have disintegrated.

- Finn's Weavers nest were seen along with Streaked Weavers *P. manyar* in Typha reeds. The birds were carrying nesting material from munj grass *Saccharum munja* to the reed beds.
- Males were defending territories and aggressively lunging at each other.
- Males were seen moving in circular motions around the females while the females were seen moving from one nest to another. It looked like the females were inspecting the nests.
- Males performed wing-beating activity at nesting colonies, advertising songs to attract females.
- Finn's Weavers were more active during the morning period but during the noon time there was no activity in and around the nests.
- It seems less rainfall and dry conditions of the area are possibly the two reasons due to which Finn's Weaver might have left the nesting site.
- Cultivation of water chestnut in and fishing in this area are one of the major threats to the habitat of Finn's weaver in this area.



Haripura reservoir



Nesting Site of Finn's Weaver



Finn's Weaver Male actively engaged in Nest making



Finn's Weaver Males



Finn's Weaver Male



Finn's Weaver Female



Disintegrated Nest of Finn's Weaver



Haripura reservoir due to lack of rainfall