

# AMIR MOHTASHEMI



## **A Study of a Female Crimson-Browed Finch, *Carpodacus subhimachalus***

Calcutta, India, c. 1800

watercolour on J Whatman paper

Provenance: Collector's seal on verso in Persian: 'The Right Honourable Lord Bahadur Viscount Valentia, 1217 (1802-3)'

42cm high, 26.5cm wide

Stock no.: A5494

Displaying her alert diligence, a female crimson-browed finch perches on a branch. Her large and powerful grey bill is perfectly suited to cracking open seeds, upon which she feeds tentatively amongst pines and junipers. Her head is a soft ashy-brown with paler tinges around the cheek. The wing feathers descend from silvery browns to hazel and deeper browns as they reach the tail. The throat is a faint primrose yellow, fading to pale grey across the belly to the undertail-coverts.

Located in India, Nepal, Bhutan, China and Myanmar, crimson-browed finches appear in pairs or small groups in temperate forests and shrublands. Deriving from the Latin sub (beneath) and Hindi himachal (snow), the binomial name *Corythus subhimachalus* was described in 1836 by British naturalist Brian Houghton Hodgson.

Despite this not being the most audaciously coloured of the Fringillidae family, the artist of the present work demonstrates a tremendous enthusiasm for capturing the bird in an accurate and detailed manner.

The feathers have been painstakingly delineated with minute brushstrokes and appear to shimmer across the bird's back. The eye is sharp and conveys a sense of the bird's intelligent yet wary nature.

The proportions of the body also appear accurately, revealing the crimson-browed to be one of the larger finches. Given this characterful and accurate study, it would appear that the artist was not simply working from another illustration, but rather they had a true understanding of and familiarity with

this particular species of bird.

Written in pencil below the bird: 'Female? Of the Crimson Headed Finch'.

For additional ornithological studies made for Lord Valentia, see Sotheby's Sven Ghalin Collection Lot 36 a drawing of a bustard, and Lot 37 a watercolour of a crow-pheasant, both made for Lord Valentia; Sotheby's, London, 31 May 2011, The Stuart Cary Welch Collection, Part Two, lot 115; see also Welch 1976, no.26; Welch 1978-I, nos.18a-c.and Leach 1995, no.7.96, pp.760-2. For two bird studies donated by Viscount Valentia to Lord Wellesley, see British Library in London (Wellesley Collection, NHD 29, vol. iv, f.21,27).

#### Literature

Bikram Grewal et al. 2016. Birds of India - A Pictorial Field Guide. Om Books International.