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## The Asian Emerald Dove *Chalcophaps indica* in Jammu

On the evening of 24 August 2019 we were birding in the Environment Park, Raika, in Jammu city. The park is located on the Jammu–Srinagar bypass and is managed by the Department of Ecology, Environment and Remote Sensing, and is a major birding destination since a few years. Its vegetation consists

of mixed broadleaved trees and scrub, which makes it a suitable habitat for a variety of birds, animals, and butterflies.

At 1745 h, while walking towards the exit gate of the park, a colourful dove suddenly flew in and perched on a branch near a water source. We were a bit surprised, however, we managed to capture four to five pictures [38] before it flew away towards a nearby tree. We observed the dove for two to three minutes after which it disappeared inside the dense vegetation. The dove was identified by its emerald green upperparts, and a shoulder patch, as a male Asian Emerald Dove *Chalcophaps indica*. It has not been reported from erstwhile Jammu & Kashmir in the recent past. In fact, its distribution in the region is dubious; we analyse the historical reports and establish ours to be the first definitive record.



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Adams (1859) mentioned a probable *Columba* species sporting bronze wings, in the lesser ranges of Kashmir. Ticehurst (1930) accepted that record, showing its distribution throughout the lower Himalayas, however, keeping it in the probable list for Kashmir. Ward (1907) included it in the Kashmir checklist based on Adams' report, wherein he mentioned it to have been collected in Poonch and the outer ranges of the Punjab mountains. Ali & Ripley (1987) also accepted that record and gave its distribution from the lower Himalaya (Jammu) to the North-East Frontier Agency (NEFA) (=Arunachal Pradesh). Grimmett et al. (2011) showed its range reaching the southern end of Himachal Pradesh, with an independent record from Jammu & Kashmir, probably also based on the Adams (1859) record. Rasmussen & Anderton (2012) described its range starting from Uttarakhand. HBW Alive (Baptista et al. 2020) shows its range starting from Nepal, whereas eBird (2020) has multiple sightings from Himachal and it occurs throughout the lower regions of the state, including Chamba (Sondhi 2001) and Kangra districts (den Besten 2004; Dhadwal & Kanwar 2018); Chamba being adjacent to Jammu & Kashmir. There is also a specimen in the Field Museum of Natural History, United States, from Punjab (Vertnet 2020), which also borders southern Jammu & Kashmir. Hence, our observation establishes that the bird at least occurs sparingly in Jammu & Kashmir, need not be considered unexpected, based on its distribution in adjoining states of Himachal and Punjab.

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## Western Reef Egret *Egretta gularis* at Chhatargarh RD 507, Bikaner District, Rajasthan, India

On 06 August 2017, while on a birdwatching trip to IGNP canal escape reservoir at RD (Reduced Distance) 507 (28.46°N, 73.25°E) near Chhatargarh, Bikaner District, we spotted, and photographed [39] a single Western Reef Egret *Egretta gularis* at 1020 h. It was perched on a wetland shrub, in the middle of a shallow saline waterbody, alongside Cattle- *Bubulcus ibis* and Little- *E. garzetta* egrets. It was a bird in the dark grey morph and was occasionally using its wings to form a canopy when scanning the shallow waters for potential prey.



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39. Western Reef Egret in Bikaner District, Rajasthan.

The Western Reef Egret can be confused with a dark morph specimen of the Little Egret. An adult Little Egret has a dark bill throughout the year, although it can be paler at the base in winter (Dubois & Yésou 1995). From the image provided, a yellowish lore is visible on the Western Reef Heron, and its bill is not as dark as that of the Little Egret's. Also, stronger, and longer legs, and thicker base of the bill are significant features of a Western Reef Egret. Although the bird looks like a Little Egret, the features listed above outweigh the possibility of dark morph Little Egret.

The Western Reef Egret is mostly found along the western and south-eastern coast of India (Grimmett et al. 2011; Kazmierczak 2000). It tends to be a coastal bird, frequenting various habitats from rocky shores to mudflats (Dubois & Yésou 1995). RD 507 in Chhatargarh is a part of the Thar Desert in Rajasthan, and approximately 720 kms inland from the nearest coast in Gujarat. There are some previous records of Western Reef Egret from Rajasthan (Chhangani et al., 2015; Sharma et al., 2015). Thomas (2017) recorded a single Western Reef Egret near Barkheda Lake outside Jaipur. The Western Reef Egret has been reported further inland, in Jhajjar (Haryana), Dehradun, and Jim Corbett National Park (Uttarakhand); however, no photographs, or documentary evidence of these records is available (eBird 2020).

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