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Observation of facial lesions in an Oriental Turtle Dove *Streptopelia orientalis*

An adult *Oriental Turtle Dove Streptopelia orientalis* was observed with noticeable facial lesions on 17 February 2025 during a routine avifaunal survey at Govindgarh Dam (26.430°N, 74.377°E), Ajmer, the site of the Luni River's origin in Rajasthan. The individual was perched on a wire near farmlands and showed no abnormal behavior. However, visible abnormalities around the cere and beak raised suspicion of a possible disease condition.

Close-up photographs **[278]** revealed prominent, crusted nodules on the upper and lower mandibles and cere. The morphology of these lesions suggests a cutaneous manifestation of avian pox, an infection caused by the *Avipoxvirus*. This virus affects numerous avian taxa worldwide (Williams et al. 2021), typically producing proliferative sores on unfeathered skin regions.

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278. Oriental Turtle Dove displaying raised, crusted lesions on the mandible and cere.

Although avian pox remains the most probable diagnosis based on external characteristics, other potential causes should be considered. Trichomoniasis, caused by *Trichomonas gallinae*, produces caseous lesions in the crop and oral cavity that may extend externally to the beak (Stabler 1954). Ectoparasitic infections caused by *Knemidocoptes* mites can also lead to crusty growth around the beak, although these are usually accompanied by generalized skin thickening (Wade 2006). Neoplastic growth, while rare in wild birds, cannot be completely excluded (Zehnder et al. 2016). Based on the lesion's appearance and location, avian pox remains the most plausible cause, followed by trichomoniasis or mite infestation. Nevertheless, the precise etiology remains uncertain in the absence of clinical examination or histopathological confirmation.

Cutaneous avian pox lesions have previously been recorded in Rock Pigeon *Columba livia* (Hibl et al. 2019), Mourning Dove *Zenaida macroura* (Pledger 2005), and Speckled Pigeon *Columba guinea* (Bwala et al. 2015). Such lesions are typically wart-like and occur in unfeathered areas including the eyelids, cere, legs, and perioral regions. In India, *Avipoxvirus* infection has been reported in several species of wild birds (Pawar et al. 2011). Transmission of avian pox occurs both through direct contact between birds and via mechanical vectors, notably mosquitoes (Greenacre 2005).

This observation may represent an isolated incident. However, consistent monitoring of visible abnormalities in free-ranging bird populations, supplemented by citizen science initiatives that screen publicly shared photographs for disease symptoms, could serve as an effective early-warning system for tracking disease dynamics in avifauna, particularly in regions where wildlife increasingly interfaces with human-altered landscapes.

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