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continued on the back inside cover

Cover: Mixed media with fine liners, colour pencils, and watercolour background of an Indian funnel web spider. © Elakshi Mahika Molur.

The Kashmir Gliding Squirrel has a scattered population across the Himalaya. Their overly dependence on old-growth forests makes them vulnerable to habitat changes such as deforestation and habitat fragmentation both of which have contributed largely to their population decline (Sheikh & Molur 2005). Besides, their fascinating agility to glide through the air also renders them attractive targets for hunting (Umapathy & Kumar 2000; Kumara & Singh 2006). The population size and distribution of the Kashmir Gliding Squirrel is not known. Although listed as 'Least Concern' (IUCN 2016), the species is rare to find and has remained understudied due to its elusive and nocturnal nature, and inhabiting remote and inaccessible areas. This emphasizes the urgent need for conservation efforts to protect this unique species.

STUDY AREA

The valley of Gurez lies in the Great Himalayan range of Jammu & Kashmir. It is situated at an altitude of 2,400–4,300 m. The vegetation of the region varies with the altitude and is characterized by pine, fir, and

cedar at lower elevations to alpine flora such as juniper and rhododendron at higher reaches. The Gurez Valley is a treasure of a diverse array of wildlife species such as Himalayan Brown Bear, Himalayan Black Bear, Himalayan Marmot, Musk Deer, Common Leopard, Himalayan Ibex, and various species of birds (Dad & Khan 2011). The valley is crucial for its biodiversity and serves as a habitat for both resident and migratory bird species.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The two individuals of the Kashmir Gliding Squirrel were observed at 20:04 h on 25 May 2024, while walking in a dense forest near the Gurrai Nallah (34.593°N 74.657°E) at an elevation of 2,840 m (Image 1 & 2). The individuals displayed typical behaviours of squirrels such as gliding between trees and feeding on bark and tree foliage. Two gliding incidents were reported and these were performed between two spruce trees. The average gliding height was around 9 m and the distance between the gliding trees was 5 m. The identification of *E. fimbriatus* was confirmed on the basis of its distinctive morphological features which include a large dark brown

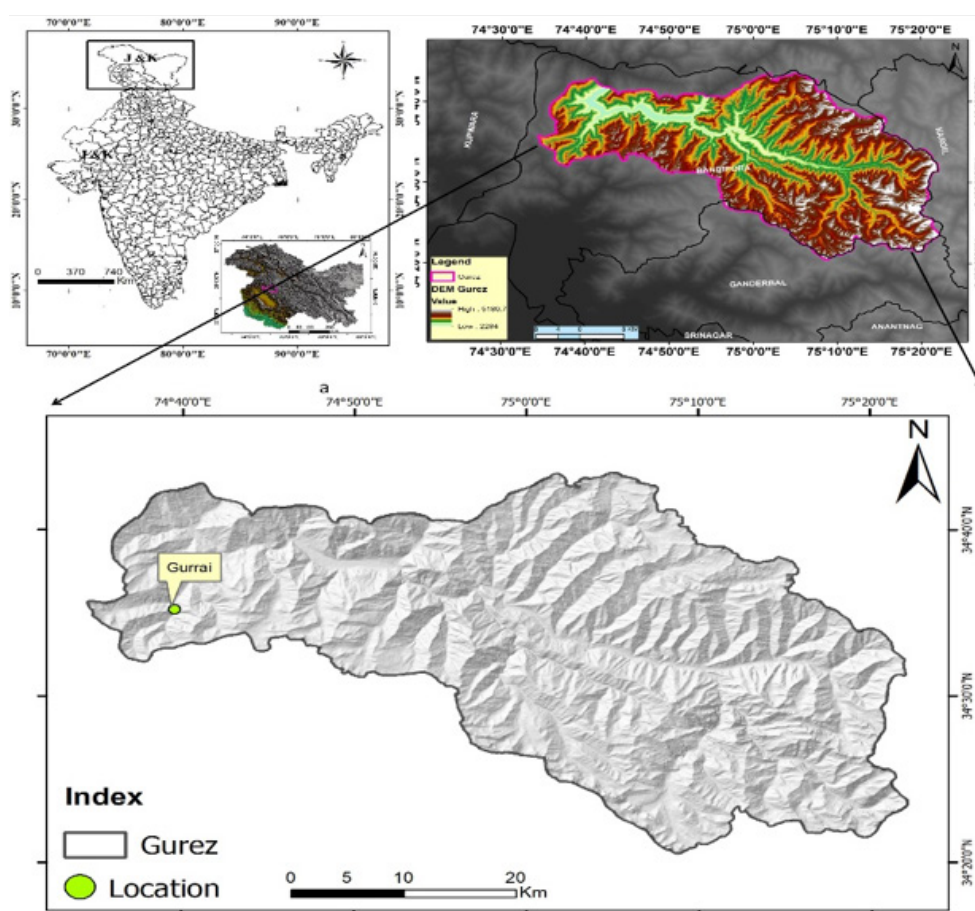


Image 1. Map of the Gurez valley showing sighting location of the Kashmir Gliding Squirrel.



Image 2. Photographic evidence of the Kashmir Gliding Squirrel in Gurrai Nallah, Gurez. © Gh Mustafa Lone.



Image 3. Habitat of the Kashmir Gliding Squirrel in Gurrai Nallah, Gurez. © Gh Mustafa Lone.

or black orbit, elongated skull, large and blunt ears, and long whiskers. The back fur is long and the belly hair is creamy in colour (Roberts 1977; Ahmad et al. 2023). The tail is slightly flat, bushy, and brown along with the black tip. The outer edge of the hindlimb has a broad clump of hairs (Jerdon 1867; Sterndale 1884; Pasha & Suhail 1997).

The habitat from where this species was recorded is a typical conifer dominated by *Abies pindrow*, *Picea smithiana*, and *Pinus wallichiana*, which are essential for the species' nesting and foraging activities (Image 3). The sighting of the Kashmir Gliding Squirrel from the Gurez Valley highlights that the valley's forest ecosystems provide suitable habitat conditions for the

species. The presence of mature forests with ample tree cover and minimal human disturbance appears to be critical for the survival of *E. fimbriatus*. This finding emphasizes the importance of preserving these habitats from deforestation and other anthropogenic pressures to ensure species' long-term survival.

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Articles

Endemicity and diversity of birds of the Kuvempu University Campus, Shivamogga District, Karnataka: an updated checklist
– M.N. Harisha & B.B. Hosetti, Pp. 26063–26077

Unregulated wild orchid trade in Manipur: an analysis of the Imphal Valley markets from the Indo-Burma hotspot
– Kamei Kambuikhonlu Kabuini & Maibam Dhanaraj Meitei, Pp. 26078–26088

Watershed survey of streams in western Bhutan with macroinvertebrates, water chemistry, bacteria and DNA barcodes
– Juliann M. Battle, Bernard W. Sweeney, Bryan Currinder, Anthony Aufdenkampe, Beth A. Fisher & Naimul Islam, Pp. 26089–26103

Communications

Indian Leopard predation on the sub-adult Himalayan Griffon Vulture (Accipitridae: Accipitriformes)
– Soumya Sundar Chakraborty, Debal Ray, Apurba Sen, P.J. Hari Krishnan, Nabi Kanta Jha & Rounaq Ghosh, Pp. 26104–26109

Diet composition and diet choice of Lesser Mouse-tailed Bat *Rhinopoma hardwickii* (Gray, 1831) (Rhinopomatidae: Chiroptera)
– Pawan Kumar Misra, Sayma Farheen, Shaktivardhan Singh & Vadmalai Elangovan, Pp. 26110–26115

DNA barcoding and distribution of *Osteobrama peninsularis* (Teleostei: Cyprinidae) in India
– Boni Amin Laskar, Asha Kiran Tudu, Shibananda Rath & Laishram Kosygin, Pp. 26116–26123

Diving into diversity: aquatic beetles of Sukhna Wildlife Sanctuary, Chandigarh, India
– Karmannye Om Chaudhary, Pp. 26124–26130

Review

An updated checklist of snakes (Reptilia: Squamata) in northeastern India derived from a review of recent literature
– Bijay Basfore, Manab Jyoti Kalita, Narayan Sharma & Ananda Ram Boro, Pp. 26131–26149

Viewpoint

Decades of IUCN recommendations for biocontrol of invasive pest on the Guam cycad: you can lead policy-makers to conservation proposals but you cannot make them follow

– Thomas E. Marler, Anders J. Lindström, L. Irene Terry & Benjamin E. Deloso, Pp. 26150–26162

Short Communications

Photographic record of Kashmir Gliding Squirrel *Eoglaucomys fimbriatus* (J.E. Gray, 1837) from the Gurez Valley, Jammu & Kashmir, India

– G. Mustufa Lone, Bilal A. Bhat, Mir Shabir Hussain & Arif Nabi Lone, Pp. 26163–26166

Winter population of raptor species in the Vellalore dump yard of Coimbatore City, India

– V. Balaji & R. Venkitachalam, Pp. 26167–26171

Notes

Phenotypic variations in Mindoro Warty Pig *Sus oliveri* (Cetartiodactyla: Suidae)

– John Carlo Redefia-Santos, Anna Pauline O. de Guia, Nikki Heherson A. Dagamac & Fernando García Gil, Pp. 26172–26175

First photographic evidence of the Chinese Pangolin *Manis pentadactyla* (Linnaeus, 1758) in Raimona National Park, Assam, India

– Dipankar Lahkar, M. Firoz Ahmed, Bhanu Sinha, Pranjal Talukdar, Biswajit Basumatary, Tunu Basumatary, Ramie H. Begum, Nibir Medhi, Nitul Kalita & Abishek Harihar, Pp. 26176–26179

***Habenaria spencei* (Orchidaceae): rediscovery other than its type locality and new distribution record to Karnataka, India**
– Shreyas Betageri & Katrahalli Kotresha, Pp. 26180–26184

Book Review

Fairies of the day and angels of the night
– Chitra Narayanasami, Pp. 26185–26186

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