



# New Distributional Records of Asian Chameleons (*Chamaeleo zeylanicus* Laurenti 1768), from the Northern Aravali Hill Range, India

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The Asian Chameleon (*Chamaeleo zeylanicus* Laurenti 1768), an arboreal reptile species belonging to the Chamaeleonidae family, is one of the very few reptilian species protected under the Wildlife (Protection) Act 1972 (Schedule II). It is distributed in India, Sri Lanka, and Pakistan at an elevation of 1,842 m asl (Srinivasulu et al. 2014; Abinesh and Vishnu 2022; Uetz et al. 2022). In India, *C. zeylanicus* has been recorded from the entire Indian Peninsula region, including the Western Ghats. It is generally found in scrublands, dry deciduous forests, and secondary forests (Srinivasulu et al. 2014), but detailed ecological and habitat studies have yet to be carried out.

The Aravali Hill Range plays a vital role in the species' distribution. Currently, large scale habitat alteration or degradation in this region, due to expanding human settlement and agricultural activities, has resulted in many reptiles being pushed to the verge of extinction (Joshi et al. 2017). In India, the Aravali Hill Range is spread across the States of Gujarat, Rajasthan, and Haryana. In the last two decades, *C. zeylanicus* was observed by Gaur (2004), Bhatnagar and Mahur (2008), Bhatnagar et al. (2010), Sharma et al. (2011), Vyas (2011), Sharma (2014), and Sharma and Koli (2018) in the Aravali Range (in the States of Gujarat and Rajasthan) of India. In the State of Rajasthan, it occurs in the southern and central parts of the state, but is absent from the extreme north (including northeast) and the western parts of the state (Srinivasulu et al. 2014). Although Srinivasulu et al. (2014) listed the species as being of "Least Concern" in the IUCN Red List, it is rarely encountered in Rajasthan (Sharma and Koli 2018) and *C. zeylanicus* has not been recorded from the State of Haryana to date.

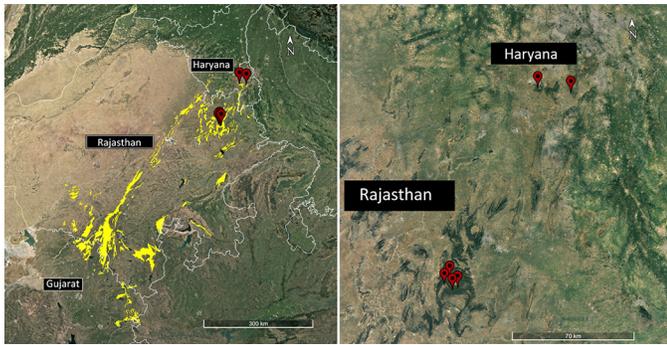
During the period from 2015 to 2022, six individuals of *C. zeylanicus* (Fig. 1) were recorded from the northern region of Rajasthan (Sariska Tiger Reserve) and from the southern region of Haryana (Manesar and Damdama Lake) (Fig. 2).

The photograph for this observation has been deposited to the University of Kansas Digital Archive (digital voucher ID: KUDA 13850). The elevational profile for the presence of *C. zeylanicus* ranges from 223 m asl to 476 m asl. From Rajasthan, four *C. zeylanicus* were recorded in a forestland dominated by *Adathoda vasica*, *Parthenium integrifolium*, and *Prosopis juliflora* during the months of May to July. In the state of Haryana two individuals were recorded in urban landscapes (roads) during the months of January and October (where the nearby vegetation is dominated by *Capparis deciduas* and *Prosopis juliflora*). Chameleons are a cryptic species, and in this region are primarily sighted during rainy seasons, when they are conspicuous while crossing blacktop roads.

This species has so far been documented in 12 Aravallian districts of Rajasthan, where it occurs throughout the Aravali Mountain Range (Sharma and Koli 2018). Although present across the forest types in Rajasthan, chameleons appear to be



Fig. 1. *Chamaeleo zeylanicus* crossing the road in Manesar, Haryana, India. Photograph by Debaprasad Sengupta.



**Fig. 2.** Google Earth® map showing locations in Rajasthan and Haryana, India, where *Chamaeleo zeylanicus* was recorded. Red symbols mark specific localities. Yellow indicates the Aravali Hill Range.

most abundant in tropical dry deciduous forest and tropical thorn forest, and in areas where the two forest types meet (Sharma and Koli 2018). This record of *C. zeylanicus* from the northern region of Rajasthan and in the State of Haryana, provided an overview of the spatial distribution of the species in the Aravali Hill Range. It is interesting to note that the patchy distribution of this lizard is associated with the distribution of some floral species associated with the Aravali Hill Range, which can provide safe shelter to this lizard due to their dense thorny texture, and simultaneously offer a good source of food due to the many insects that dwell both on and around these plants.

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