

Expanding the known range: *Spalerosophis diadema diadema* (Schlegel, 1837) in the temperate western Himalayan region, India

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The genus *Spalerosophis* Jan, 1865 (family Colubridae) is widely distributed across arid and semi-arid regions from North Africa through West and Central Asia into India (Marx, 1959; Schatti et al., 2010). Of the six described *Spalerosophis* species, *Spalerosophis diadema* (Schlegel, 1837) is a polytypic species consisting of three subspecies: *S. d. cliffordi* (Schlegel, 1837), *S. d. schirazianus* (Jan, 1863) and *S. d. diadema* (Schlegel, 1837). *Spalerosophis d. diadema* occurs in the Indo-Pakistan region (Marx, 1959; Baig and Masroor, 2008). Within the Jammu & Kashmir region, *Spalerosophis d. diadema* has been reported from several districts including Kathua, Jammu, Udhampur, Ramban, and Poonch (Sahi and Duda, 1985; Hussain et al., 2023). However, no prior documented records exist from the Chenab Valley region comprising Doda, Kishtwar, and Ramban districts.

On 5 June 2025, at 11:40 h, an individual of *S. d. diadema* was encountered in the vicinity of Govt. Degree College Thathri Campus (33.1457°N, 75.7891°E, elevation 916 m), Doda District, Jammu and Kashmir, India (Fig. 1). The individual was captured, photographed (Fig. 2A–B) and released nearby, away from the college campus. Observed diagnostic features included an elongated head distinct from the neck, large brown dorsal blotches on a ruddy brown background,

divided nasals, and undivided anal plate. No aggression or defensive posturing was observed.

On the next day (6 June 2025), the authors surveyed the area around the campus again and found another individual of *S. d. diadema* with a dark colour variation (Fig. 3). This individual was again rescued and released with the help of local wildlife department. No harm was caused to the individuals while rescuing them.

The current observations represent the first confirmed record of *S. d. diadema* from District Doda, a part of the Chenab valley region in Jammu & Kashmir Himalayas. Previous studies, including extensive reptile surveys by Manhas et al. (2018) in Doda District, did not report this species. Sharma and Sharma (1975) had recorded *S. articeps* and *S. arenarius* from Bhaderwah in Doda District but again no records of *S. d. diadema* were found. Previous studies on the distribution and habitat preferences of *S. diadema* have primarily documented its occurrence in arid and semi-arid environments across its range in the Indo-Pakistan region, Iran, and the Middle East (Marx, 1959; Baig and Masroor, 2008; Moadab et al., 2018). However, the present record from

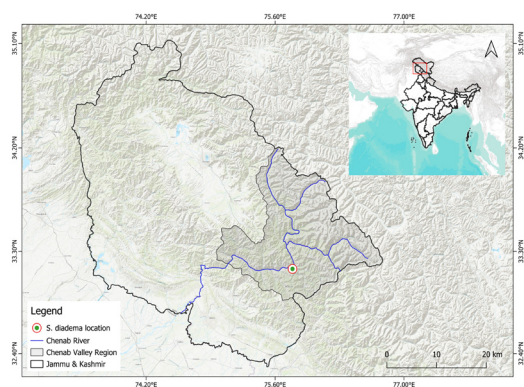


Figure 1. Map of Jammu & Kashmir, India showing the location of the *S. d. diadema* record. Map inset shows the location of the current record w.r.t. South Asia.

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Figure 2. (A–B) Photographs of *S. d. diadema* individual rescued on 05 June 2025. Photos by Muzaffar A. Kichloo.

Thathri in Doda District, which falls within a temperate climatic zone characterised by distinct seasons, higher annual precipitation (1000–1500 mm), and cooler winter temperatures including occasional snowfall, represents a noteworthy habitat extension for this species.

This observation suggests a greater ecological plasticity in *S. diadema* than previously documented, enabling it to exploit temperate hill environments in addition to its established arid and semi-arid habitats. This is significant for understanding the adaptive ecology and biogeographic range of the species in the western Himalayas, warranting further herpetofaunal surveys to reassess the species' distributional limits and habitat associations in the region.



Figure 3. Photograph of *S. d. diadema* individual rescued on 06 June 2025. Photos by Muzaffar A. Kichloo.

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