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MOVING UP THE MOUNTAINS: TWO NEW RECORDS OF INVASIVE ALIEN PLANT SPECIES FROM JAMMU, WESTERN HIMALAYA

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Biological invasions are an increasingly significant component of global environmental change, posing substantial threats to local biodiversity. This study reports the naturalization of two alien plant species, *Verbesina encelioides* (Cavanilles) Benth. & Hook. f. ex A. Gray and *Calyptocarpus vialis* Less., in the Jammu region of India. These species, originally native to the American continents, have been documented for the first time to occur as self-sustaining natural population at several localities across this Himalayan region. Being globally known invasive species, detailed morphological features, habitat preferences, and community composition are provided to validate these new distribution records. Our results reveal a positive association between these alien species and other invasive species in the community that share similar traits, while interestingly showing a negative association with native species found within the same environment. Habitat characterization indicates that both species are thriving in disturbed areas, suggesting potential anthropogenic introduction pathways. This suggests the occurrence of invasion meltdown and habitat filtering among the alien species pool in the region. These findings contribute to the early detection of these invasive alien species and highlight the need for ongoing monitoring and management of non-native species in the area.

Keywords: Anthropogenic; biological invasion; climate change; ecological shift; invasion meltdown; tropicalisation

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