



**A study of a male Common Emerald Dove, *Chalcophaps Indica***

China, 19th century

Watercolour and gold leaf on paper

38 cm high, 25 cm wide

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This exquisitely painted study depicts a male Common or Asian Emerald Dove perched amongst an inflorescence of delicate pink blossom. The bird has an electric blue crown, vivid orange beak and forest green wings, whose emerald highlights glint as they catch the light. Along the neck, chest and underside, minutely detailed salmon scallops create a harmonious and particularly aesthetic pattern. Other notable detail appears in the form of tiny white dots, which form a ring encircling the bird's eye.

The resplendent plumage has gained an iridescent quality, owing to the fact that the bird has been painted on a background of gold leaf. The use of such a valuable material combined with the painstaking detail employed in the depiction of the species, indicates that a highly accomplished artist, in the service of a notable patron, must have undertaken the work.

Also known as the Asian emerald dove, the present species is native to Southeast Asia and the Indian subcontinent. The males are discernible from the females by the rich blue feathers appearing on the crown and top of the wings. As an average sized member of the pigeon family, the birds range between

approximately 20-30cm in length. The work appears on J. Whatman paper and is numbered "544" on the reverse.

A comparable series of extremely proficient ornithological studies feature in the Farquhar collection in Singapore, (see for example a Zebra Dove or Barred Ground Dove, (*Geopelia striata*), perched on a purple mangosteen branch, National Museum of Singapore: SHM1995.2988). During his time in Malacca and Singapore in the early nineteenth century, Major-General William Farquhar commissioned Chinese artists to paint highly accomplished studies of the local fauna and flora. Not only do collections such as these and the present work

allure and delight the viewer, they also provide an invaluable historic record of native species for ornithologists and scientists alike.

## References

Karen Philips and John Mackinnon. 2022. Guide to the Birds of China. OUP Oxford.

Khim, G.G. The William Farquhar Collection of Natural History Drawings. Singapore. Goh Geok Khim, 1999.