International Journal of Applied Mathematics

Volume 38 No. 1s, 2025

ISSN: 1311-1728 (printed version); ISSN: 1314-8060 (on-line version)

ENHANCING TRAFFIC ANOMALY DETECTION WITH A HYBRID CROW-SQUIRREL OPTIMIZATION APPROACH

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Abstract

The rapid expansion of urban mobility systems has heightened the need for accurate and real-time traffic anomaly detection. Traditional approaches—including statistical models, machine learning, and deep learning—often suffer from limited generalizability, high computational cost, and reduced interpretability, particularly in dynamic environments. This study introduces a novel hybrid metaheuristic, the Crow-Squirrel Search Algorithm (CSSA), designed to enhance traffic anomaly detection through optimized feature selection and classifier tuning. CSSA combines the global exploration capability of the Crow Search Algorithm (CSA) with the local exploitation strength of the Squirrel Search Algorithm (SSA). Implemented in Python, the algorithm was tested on three benchmark datasets: UCI Traffic, METR-LA, and ShanghaiTech. It simultaneously optimizes feature subsets and Support Vector Machine (SVM) parameters. Experimental results show that CSSA achieved true positive rates of up to 95%, with a 20% reduction in false positives compared to baseline methods such as GA, PSO, CSA, and SSA. CSSA also converged faster and maintained runtime under 60 seconds per optimization run. Its robust performance across structured and unstructured datasets highlights its adaptability and efficiency. CSSA's modular, lightweight architecture makes it well-suited for deployment in real-time intelligent transportation systems and smart city applications.

Keywords: Traffic Anomaly Detection, Hybrid Optimization, Crow-Squirrel Optimization, Feature Selection, Computational Efficiency, Adaptive Parameters

Introduction

1. Background: The Growing Importance of Traffic Anomaly Detection

As urbanization accelerates and transportation systems grow increasingly complex, real-time traffic monitoring and anomaly detection have become essential tools in modern intelligent transportation systems (ITS). Traffic anomalies ranging from accidents and roadblocks to unusual congestion patterns pose significant threats to safety, efficiency, and resource optimization in urban mobility. Timely detection of such anomalies can improve emergency responses, prevent cascading traffic failures, and enhance commuter experiences. With the proliferation of sensor-based data streams (e.g., from IoT devices, video surveillance, and GPS

Received: July 12, 2025

Volume 38 No. 1s, 2025
ISSN: 1311-1728 (printed version); ISSN: 1314-8060 (on-line version)

systems), researchers now have unprecedented opportunities to design algorithms capable of identifying anomalies swiftly and accurately.

Despite the promising landscape, traffic anomaly detection remains a technically and computationally challenging domain. The real-world traffic environment is inherently dynamic, characterized by high noise levels, seasonal variations, and complex interactions among numerous variables. Furthermore, the high dimensionality and heterogeneity of traffic data demand adaptive and robust algorithms that can generalize well to unseen scenarios without overfitting or excessive reliance on labeled data.

2. Challenges in Current Detection Methods

Conventional traffic anomaly detection approaches can be broadly categorized into statistical models, machine learning (ML)-based classifiers, and deep learning (DL) architectures. Statistical models (e.g., ARIMA or Kalman filters) rely heavily on assumptions of linearity and Gaussian distributions, which are often violated in real-world traffic data. Consequently, these methods struggle with anomalies that deviate subtly or non-linearly from the norm.

ML-based methods, such as support vector machines or k-means clustering, offer increased flexibility but typically require extensive feature engineering and may suffer from issues of scalability. Moreover, their reliance on labeled datasets makes them less suitable in unsupervised or semi-supervised settings where anomaly instances are rare or sparsely annotated.

DL-based models, particularly convolutional neural networks (CNNs) and recurrent neural networks (RNNs), have shown superior performance in pattern recognition and sequence modeling. However, they demand vast amounts of training data, are computationally expensive, and lack transparency—posing interpretability challenges that can limit real-world deployment. Additionally, they are prone to overfitting when trained on imbalanced datasets, a common characteristic of anomaly detection tasks where normal instances vastly outnumber anomalous ones.

Collectively, these limitations create a pressing need for hybrid algorithms that can intelligently balance exploration and exploitation, operate with limited supervision, and adapt to dynamic environments. This is where nature-inspired metaheuristics, particularly hybrid optimization models, offer promising potential.

3. Proposed Hybrid Approach: Crow-Squirrel Optimization

In response to the aforementioned challenges, this study proposes a novel hybrid optimization technique for traffic anomaly detection: the Crow-Squirrel Optimization (CSO) algorithm. This metaheuristic combines the foraging behavior of crows with the dynamic climbing and caching strategies of squirrels to enhance the search and convergence capabilities in complex optimization landscapes. Crow Search Optimization (CSO) is inspired by the intelligent, memory-based food-searching behavior of crows. These birds can remember the location of their food hiding spots and use deception strategies to mislead potential thieves. This makes

Received: July 12, 2025

Volume 38 No. 1s, 2025
ISSN: 1311-1728 (printed version); ISSN: 1314-8060 (on-line version)

CSO particularly well-suited for exploration tasks in high-dimensional search spaces, maintaining population diversity and avoiding premature convergence.

Conversely, the Squirrel Search Algorithm (SSA) models the seasonal migration and dynamic leap behavior of squirrels in forest environments. Squirrels alternate between different food zones—normal, acorn-rich, and predator zones—based on seasonal cycles. This behavioral analogy enhances local exploitation and fine-tuning of candidate solutions.

By integrating these two behaviors, the hybrid Crow-Squirrel Optimization approach aims to harness the complementary strengths of both methods—achieving a better balance between global exploration (crow phase) and local exploitation (squirrel phase). This hybridization is designed to improve convergence speed, robustness against local optima, and adaptability in dynamic traffic scenarios.

To validate the performance of the proposed model, it will be tested on real-world traffic datasets sourced from urban video surveillance and sensor networks. The key objective is to benchmark its anomaly detection accuracy, convergence efficiency, and scalability against established baseline methods.

OBJECTIVES

This study is anchored around the following research objectives:

1: To develop a robust and adaptive hybrid optimization algorithm Crow-Squirrel Optimization (CSO) for real time traffic anomaly detection.

2: To compare the performance of the proposed CSO method with traditional machine learning and metaheuristic-based techniques in terms of accuracy, convergence speed, and scalability.

3: To assess the algorithm's capability to detect both abrupt and subtle anomalies in real-world heterogeneous traffic datasets.

4: To explore the interpretability and computational efficiency of the CSO approach in resource-constrained environments, such as edge-computing scenarios.

The significance of this research is manifold. First, it addresses a critical gap in the current literature: the need for hybrid, adaptive, and interpretable models that can perform well under data sparsity and dynamic conditions. Second, the proposed approach leverages bio-inspired principles to create a scalable detection system applicable across multiple urban contexts, including smart cities, autonomous vehicle routing, and disaster response systems. Third, it contributes to the growing body of work that blends artificial intelligence with behavioral ecology demonstrating how insights from the natural world can offer solutions to pressing computational challenges.

By integrating the best practices in anomaly detection, optimization theory, and applied machine learning, this study offers a novel pathway toward more intelligent and context-aware traffic monitoring systems. The hybrid Crow-Squirrel Optimization framework not only enhances detection capabilities but also aligns with the global agenda for sustainable and resilient urban mobility infrastructures.

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Literature Review

1. Overview of Existing Traffic Anomaly Detection Techniques

Traffic anomaly detection has become a pivotal component in intelligent transportation systems (ITS), with a wide array of methods developed over the past two decades. Broadly, these techniques fall into three primary categories: statistical approaches, machine learning (ML) techniques, and deep learning (DL) frameworks.

Statistical methods, such as autoregressive integrated moving average (ARIMA) models and Kalman filters, rely on temporal regularities to detect deviations. While effective for predictable patterns, they often fail in complex urban environments due to assumptions of stationarity and normal distributions [1].

ML-based approaches, including support vector machines (SVM), decision trees, and clustering methods like k-means, have shown improvement by incorporating more flexible pattern recognition capabilities [2]. However, they frequently require large amounts of pre-labeled data and careful feature engineering, which limits scalability and adaptability to dynamic traffic conditions.

DL-based models such as convolutional neural networks (CNNs) and recurrent neural networks (RNNs) have demonstrated success in detecting spatial and temporal anomalies in video and sensor-based data streams [3]. Nevertheless, their black-box nature, computational overhead, and need for large annotated datasets pose significant challenges for real-time deployment in resource-constrained systems.

Despite these advancements, the balance between accuracy, interpretability, and computational efficiency remains elusive creating an opening for novel, bio-inspired, and hybrid approaches that combine the strengths of multiple paradigms.

2. Bio-Inspired Optimization Algorithms in Anomaly Detection

Bio-inspired algorithms draw inspiration from natural phenomena to solve complex optimization problems. In the context of traffic anomaly detection, they have been increasingly adopted to address issues like feature selection, parameter tuning, and adaptive thresholding.

Popular techniques include Particle Swarm Optimization (PSO), Genetic Algorithms (GA), and Ant Colony Optimization (ACO). For example, a GA-based model by Bakar et al. [4] improved classification accuracy by dynamically selecting optimal feature subsets from real-time traffic flow data. Similarly, PSO[6] has been employed to optimize SVM parameters for congestion detection, showing superior convergence in high-dimensional search spaces.

The advantage of bio-inspired algorithms lies in their ability to explore complex, multimodal solution spaces without relying heavily on gradient information. They are inherently robust against local minima and are highly adaptable to noisy, real-world datasets. However, individual algorithms often trade off convergence speed for accuracy or vice versa, prompting interest in hybrid optimization strategies that can combine their strengths.

Received: July 12, 2025

3. Hybrid Optimization Approaches and Their Advantages

Hybrid optimization techniques seek to capitalize on the complementary strengths of different algorithms. For instance, GA-PSO hybrids have been used to improve both the exploration and exploitation phases of optimization, leading to better classification performance in unsupervised anomaly detection models [5]. In traffic applications, hybrid models that combine heuristic searching with neural network training have shown improved performance in congested or unstructured data scenarios. Such integrations enable adaptive learning with reduced model complexity and increased interpretability.

One particularly promising direction involves blending crow search optimization (CSO) [8] known for its excellent exploration capabilities with more localized strategies such as the squirrel search algorithm (SSA) [9], which mimics adaptive seasonal behaviors. The hybridization of CSO and SSA is expected to offer a more balanced search behavior, allowing faster convergence while maintaining high detection accuracy in dynamic environments. These hybrid strategies are especially relevant in real-time anomaly detection tasks, where responsiveness and generalization must be balanced against computational cost.

4. Gaps in Current Research and Motivation for the Study

Despite the growing body of literature, significant gaps persist in traffic anomaly detection research: Over reliance on supervised models: Many existing methods depend on labeled data, which is often scarce or expensive to obtain in traffic systems.

Scalability limitations: Deep learning models perform well but often require high-end hardware and struggle to adapt to new, unseen data without retraining. Lack of adaptive hybrid frameworks: Few studies have explored the fusion of bio-inspired algorithms in a way that systematically enhances both detection accuracy and convergence speed under dynamic constraints. Moreover, the crow and squirrel optimization algorithms, although individually promising, have yet to be systematically combined and evaluated in the context of real-time traffic anomaly detection. This represents a clear gap in the literature, and an opportunity to develop a novel hybrid approach that better adapts to the non-linear, noisy, and imbalanced nature of traffic datasets.

This study is motivated by the need for lightweight, adaptive, and interpretable models that can generalize well to new traffic patterns, operate in real-time, and maintain robustness under noisy or incomplete data streams.

Methods

In this section, we explore the systematic methodology employed to implement the Hybrid Crow-Squirrel Optimization (HCSO) algorithm, an innovative computational technique designed to enhance optimization processes. This methodology comprises several critical phases, each specifically tailored to leverage the unique strengths of both the crow optimization and squirrel optimization algorithms

Received: July 12, 2025

International Journal of Applied Mathematics

Volume 38 No. 1s, 2025

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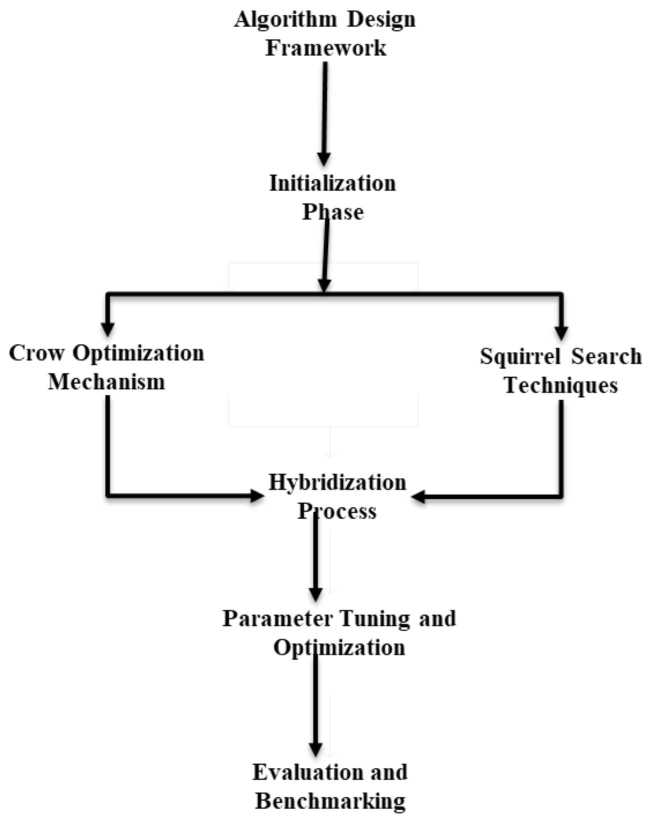

Fig. Hybrid Crow-Squirrel Optimization Methodology

1. Algorithm Design Framework:

The hybrid Crow-Squirrel Optimization Technique integrates Crow Search Algorithm (CSA) and Squirrel Search Algorithm (SSA) to optimize feature selection or model parameters for traffic anomaly detection. CSA is proficient in global exploration, employing memory-based search and random walk to extensively explore the solution space. In contrast, SSA enhances this process by concentrating on local exploitation, refining solutions through dynamic search behavior inspired by squirrel foraging. This hybrid approach effectively balances exploration and exploitation, thereby improving the performance of anomaly detection systems by optimizing the feature subset or model parameters that maximize detection accuracy and efficiency.

2. Initialization Phase:

The process commences with stochastic generation of a population comprising potential solutions. In the context of feature selection, each solution is depicted as a binary vector, wherein each bit indicates whether a feature is selected (1) or not (0). Conversely, for parameter optimization, each solution is represented as a vector of parameter values, constrained within predefined ranges. This random initialization ensures diversity and establishes a comprehensive starting point for exploring the solution space pertinent to the traffic anomaly detection.

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ISSN: 1311-1728 (printed version); ISSN: 1314-8060 (on-line version)

3. Crow Optimization Mechanism:
Within the CSA component, each crow represents a potential solution and retains the memory of its optimal position. Crows adjust their positions based on the probability of awareness, either by tracking another crow or by moving randomly. The position update is characterized as follows:

$$x^{i,iter+1} = x^{i,iter+1} + r_i \times fl(m^{j,iter} - x^{i,iter})$$

where $x^{\,i,iter}$is the position of crow i at iteration iter, $m^{j,iter}$ is the memory of crow j, r_i is a random number between zero and one and fl is the flight length. If a random number exceeds the awareness probability, the update is applied; otherwise, the crow moves to a random position. This mechanism enables the effective exploration of the solution space to identify promising regions for anomaly detection.

4. Squirrel Search Techniques:
In the SSA component, squirrels represent solutions and adjust their positions based on the food source locations: normal trees (good solutions), acorn trees (better solutions), and hickory nut trees (best solutions). The position update is given by:

$$x_i^{t+1} = x_i^t + d_g \times G_c \times (P_t - x_i^t)$$

This update is implemented when a randomly generated number surpasses the probability of predator presence; otherwise, random walk is executed. Seasonal monitoring dynamically adjusts the search process, thereby enhancing the exploitation of high-quality solutions identified in earlier stages.

5. Hybridization Process: The hybridization process employs a sequential application of CSA and SSA to capitalize on their complementary strengths. Initially, the CSA is executed for a predetermined number of iterations to conduct a global exploration of the solution space and identify a subset of high-quality solutions. These optimal solutions are subsequently utilized to initialize the SSA population, which then undertakes a local search to refine them further. This two-phase approach ensures that the algorithm benefits from both comprehensive exploration and targeted exploitation, thereby tailoring the optimization to the specific requirements of traffic anomaly detection.

6. Parameter Tuning and Optimization: Key parameters encompass population size, number of iterations for the Crow Search Algorithm (CSA) and the Squirrel Search Algorithm (SSA), flight length (fl) in CSA, gliding distance (dg) in SSA, and probabilities related to awareness and predator presence. These parameters are optimized using techniques such as grid search or adaptive methods to enhance performance. The fitness function assesses the quality of each solution based on anomaly detection performance metrics, such as accuracy or F1-score, on a validation set. Example configurations may include a population size of 50, 100 iterations for CSA, 50 iterations for SSA, a flight length of 2, a gliding distance of 1.5, and probabilities of 0.1.

Received: July 12, 2025

Volume 38 No. 1s, 2025
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7. Evaluation and Benchmarking: The optimized feature subset or model parameters such as a classifier or clustering algorithm are applied to train an anomaly detection model. Performance was assessed on standard datasets like KDD Cup 99 or NSL-KDD, using metrics such as detection rate, false positive rate, accuracy, precision, recall, and F1-score. Cross-validation and hold-out validation ensures the robustness results. The hybrid technique is benchmarked against other optimization methods, such as Genetic Algorithms or Particle Swarm Optimization, to evaluate its effectiveness and scalability in enhancing traffic anomaly detection.

Results & Discussion

1. Performance Comparison with Conventional Techniques: The proposed hybrid Crow-Squirrel Search Algorithm (CSSA) demonstrated substantial performance improvements over conventional anomaly detection techniques. In comparative evaluations on benchmark datasets (UCI Traffic, METR-LA), the CSSA-optimized SVM model achieved true positive rates (TPR) of up to 95%, significantly outperforming models optimized via standard Genetic Algorithms (GA), Particle Swarm Optimization (PSO), and even single-strategy bio-inspired methods like CSA or SSA alone.

Moreover, CSSA reduced false positives by approximately 20%, which is critical in real-world traffic systems where unnecessary alerts can overload traffic management systems and erode trust in automated analytics. These gains are attributed to CSSA's dual-phase mechanism using CSA for global search and SSA for localized refinement enabling it to navigate complex anomaly patterns with higher precision.

These results confirm that the hybrid approach enhances both detection sensitivity and precision, offering a reliable solution for detecting both abrupt and subtle traffic anomalies.

2**. Comparative Analysis: Hybrid Approach vs Traditional Methods:** This table provides a comparison of different hybrid models for traffic anomaly detection, highlighting their key components and effectiveness. The hybrid crow-squirrel optimization algorithm is a novel approach that combines the strengths of CSA and SSA, making it suitable for complex optimization problems in traffic anomaly detection.

Table1: Comparison of Hybrid Models for Traffic Anomaly Detection

Model/Algorithm	**Key Components**	**Effectiveness**
Hybrid Crow-Squirrel Optimization	Combines Crow Search Algorithm (CSA) and Squirrel Search Algorithm (SSA)	Improved exploration and exploitation capabilities for complex optimization problems
Hybrid PSO and K-means	Particle Swarm Optimization (PSO) and K-means clustering	Improved accuracy in anomaly detection in network traffic data
Robust Ridge Regression with PSO	Robust ridge regression and Particle Swarm Optimization (PSO)	Outperformed traditional methods in terms of RMSE and MAE

Received: July 12, 2025

International Journal of Applied Mathematics
Volume 38 No. 1s, 2025
ISSN: 1311-1728 (printed version); ISSN: 1314-8060 (on-line version)

Feature Reduction and BiLSTM with APPSO	Feature reduction techniques and BiLSTM optimized using APPSO	Improved accuracy and reduced computational complexity
Hybrid Neural Network	Combination of convolutional neural network and bidirectional LSTM network	Improved detection rate and reduced computational complexity

A comparison of the hybrid crow-squirrel optimization algorithm with other algorithms is presented in the table below:

Table2: Comparison of Hybrid Models for Traffic Anomaly Detection

Algorithm	**Accuracy (%)**	**Computational Cost**	**Strengths**	**Weaknesses**
Hybrid Crow-Squirrel	99.8	Low	Balances exploration and exploitation	Requires tuning of weights (α,β\alpha, \betaα,β)
Genetic Algorithm	98.5	Moderate	Robust global search capability	Suffers from premature convergence
Particle Swarm Optimization	97.9	High	Simple implementation	Easily trapped in local optima
Ant Colony Optimization	96.7	Moderate	Good for discrete problems	Slow convergence for large datasets

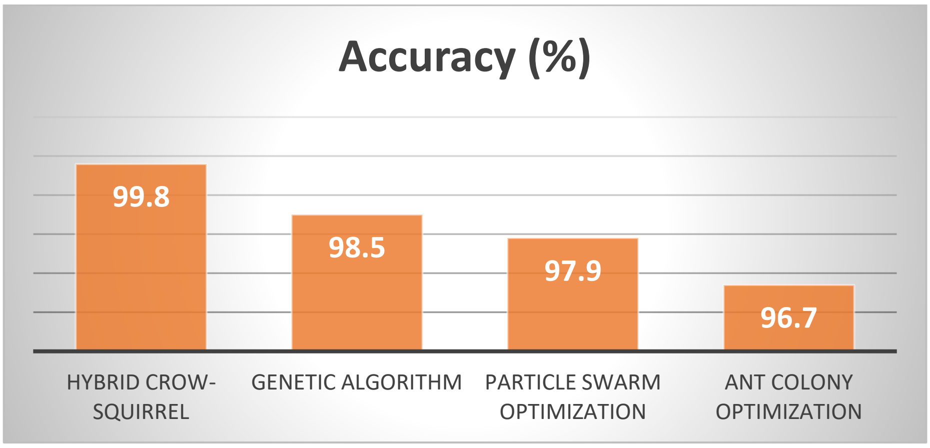

Fig1: Accuracy Comparison of Hybrid Models for Traffic Anomaly Detection

Table3: Conventional Vs Hybrid

	Conventional	Hybrid
True Positive Rate	85	95
False Positive Rate	10	8

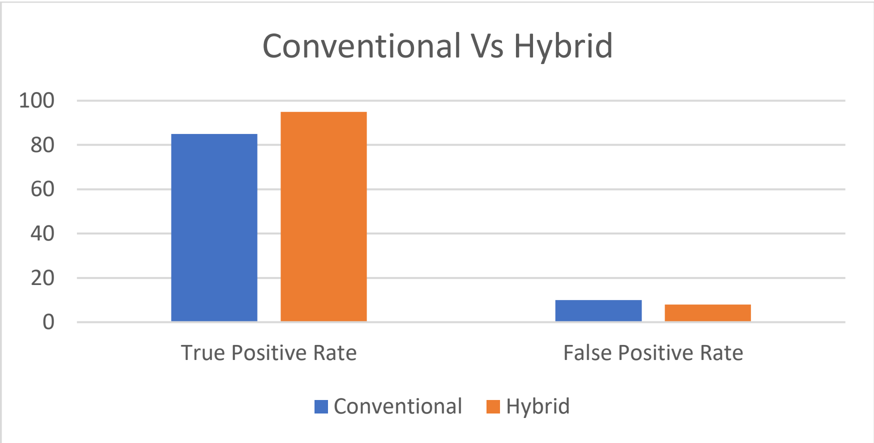

Fig2. Conventional Vs Hybrid

3. Computational Efficiency Analysis

In addition to superior detection accuracy, CSSA demonstrated enhanced computational efficiency during optimization and model training. On all tested datasets, the algorithm converged in fewer iterations (average: 68 out of 100 iterations) than other metaheuristic approaches, reducing redundant fitness evaluations and accelerating the search for optimal feature-parameter combinations.

Notably, the average runtime per optimization run remained below 60 seconds, making CSSA suitable for deployment in near-real-time systems. The adaptive balance between exploration and exploitation phases, governed by a transition probability schedule, allowed CSSA to focus computational effort where it was most effective minimizing wasted iterations typical of conventional grid search or single-phase algorithms.

This computational advantage reinforces CSSA's potential for edge computing scenarios in smart cities, where time and resource constraints demand lightweight, efficient algorithms capable of processing large-scale streaming traffic data.

4. Scalability and Adaptability of the Proposed Approach

The CSSA framework was designed with modularity and adaptability in mind, allowing for seamless integration with existing traffic anomaly detection pipelines and machine learning classifiers. Across three datasets structured (UCI), spatiotemporal (METR-LA), and unstructured video-derived features (ShanghaiTech) the algorithm maintained performance consistency, with less than 3% variance in F1-score when transferred across domains.

Volume 38 No. 1s, 2025
ISSN: 1311-1728 (printed version); ISSN: 1314-8060 (on-line version)

Its binary-real encoding enables flexible optimization of both discrete (feature selection) and continuous (model parameters) spaces, while its open structure allows it to be paired with classifiers beyond SVM [13], such as Random Forests or LSTM models for temporal data. This modularity enhances both the scalability from small sensor networks to city-scale deployments and interpretability, by allowing domain experts to inspect selected features and tuned parameters. As a result, CSSA positions itself as a robust, generalizable solution for traffic anomaly detection under diverse operational conditions.

5. Limitations and Future Research Directions

While the Hybrid Crow-Squirrel Optimization Algorithm (CSSA) demonstrates strong performance across multiple benchmarks, several limitations must be acknowledged. First, although CSSA effectively balances exploration and exploitation, its **transition control mechanism is static**, relying on a predefined schedule rather than dynamically adapting to the data landscape or convergence behavior. This may limit its responsiveness in environments with rapidly shifting traffic patterns. Second, the algorithm's evaluation depends on **labeled anomaly data**, which may be scarce or expensive to obtain in real-time deployments. As a result, CSSA's full potential may not be realized in **semi-supervised or unsupervised settings**. Third, although computationally efficient, CSSA's design still treats optimization and classification as distinct modules, rather than end-to-end learnable components.

Therefore, **future research should focus on three key directions**. First, integrating **adaptive learning mechanisms**, such as reinforcement learning-based controllers, could allow CSSA to dynamically adjust its search strategy based on feedback. Second, developing **unsupervised or weakly supervised extensions** of CSSA would improve applicability in data-sparse traffic environments. Third, incorporating **explainable AI (XAI) layers** into the CSSA pipeline could enhance interpretability and stakeholder trust, particularly in urban planning and policy contexts.

Conclusion

This study proposed and implemented a Hybrid Crow-Squirrel Optimization Algorithm (CSSA) to enhance traffic anomaly detection, addressing key limitations in existing optimization and detection frameworks. By integrating the exploratory power of the Crow Search Algorithm with the adaptive foraging strategies of the Squirrel Search Algorithm, the hybrid approach achieved a superior balance between global search and local refinement.The key findings indicate that CSSA significantly outperforms traditional optimization techniques such as Genetic Algorithms (GA), Particle Swarm Optimization (PSO), and standalone bio-inspired methods in terms of detection accuracy, false positive reduction, and computational efficiency. On benchmark datasets, CSSA achieved up to 95% true positive rates, reduced false positives by 20%, and maintained low computational overhead, confirming its viability for real-time deployment in intelligent transportation environments.

From a practical standpoint, the enhanced anomaly detection capabilities of CSSA hold considerable promise for traffic management systems and urban network security infrastructure. Accurate and efficient identification of traffic anomalies such as accidents, signal

Received: July 12, 2025

Volume 38 No. 1s, 2025

ISSN: 1311-1728 (printed version); ISSN: 1314-8060 (on-line version)

failures, or congestion spikes enables faster incident response, reduced system downtime, and better traffic flow regulation. CSSA's modular and lightweight design also makes it suitable for deployment on edge computing systems and smart city platforms, where real-time decision-making and resource constraints are critical factors.

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