

Scientific note

Partial leucism in Glossy Ibis (*Plegadis falcinellus*): a novel observation from India

(Aves, Threskiornithidae)

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On 29 December 2023, during a citizen science-based bird survey in continuation of the Kerala Bird Atlas (Praveen et al. 2022) in Umayanalloor, Kerala, India (8.8584°N, 76.6506°E), we observed a single Glossy Ibis (*Plegadis falcinellus*) displaying partial leucism. The individual was among two flocks totaling over 1000 ibises foraging in flooded paddy fields. The bird exhibited a distinct white patch on its left wing (Fig. 1), which included approximately seven primaries, nearly half of the primary coverts, and two secondaries closer to the body. The rest of its body, including head, bill, legs, and iris, exhibited normal coloration. The bird flew, landed, and foraged normally, interacting with conspecifics without visible behavioural or physical disadvantage. When at rest with folded wings, the white plumage was concealed, consistent with other reports of subtle leucistic presentations (Razafimanjato et al. 2012).

Leucism is a hereditary plumage aberration resulting from defective deposition of melanin in feathers, while melanin synthesis and eye pigmentation remain normal (van Grouw 2013). This distinguishes it from albinism, where melanin production is fully inhibited. Leucistic birds may face increased risks in the wild due to reduced camouflage, feather fragility, or social disadvantages (Parsons & Bondrup-Nielsen 1995, Smith & Rios 2017). Despite these potential challenges, our observed ibis showed no evidence of compromised flight or interaction, although long-term outcomes could not be assessed.

Leucism is rarely recorded in wild populations, especially in large, mobile birds like ibises, though it may be underreported due to low observer effort or brief visibility. Previous aberration records in ibises include a leucistic Black-headed Ibis (*Threskiornis melanocephalus*) in northern India (Chaudhury & Koli 2017), and partial albinism in *P. falcinellus* from Madagascar (Razafimanjato et al. 2012). However, to our knowledge, this is the first confirmed record of leucism in *P. falcinellus* from southern India.



Fig. 1. The colour aberrant Glossy Ibis in flight. Photo: Sandie Morris.

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