

A case of partial albinism/leucism in Red-vented Bulbul *Pycnonotus cafer* (Aves: Passeriformes: Pycnonotidae) from Visakhapatnam, Andhra Pradesh, India



Leucistic Red-vented Bulbul recorded at Lambasingi foothills, Visakhapatnam, with a greyish crest, red vent, and white body. Photo: Bhagyasree Venugopal.

This communication is aimed at reporting the first documented case of leucism in a Red-vented Bulbul *Pycnonotus cafer* (RVB) from Andhra Pradesh, India. One of the many plumage colour aberrations called leucism is characterized by partial or total reduction of melanin production or expression in birds. It is a result of genetic mutation where pigment cells do not migrate to certain parts of the body, failing in providing pigment to the developing feathers. Partially leucistic birds have normally coloured feet, bill, and eyes as opposed to albino birds (Grouw 2013).

BV sighted a white-coloured RVB on a bird-watching trip with two other birdwatchers at Lambasingi foothills of Visakhapatnam District (GPS Co-ordinates: 17.76412054 N and 82.53815621 E, Altitude: 186m). It was eye-catching and was immediately recognized by its red-coloured vent. The bird was moving along with its possible pair from one tree to another, making it difficult for it to be photographed. The bird was too cautious unlike other individuals of the same species. After perching in three different palm trees, the pair took off. RVB, an extant species in the Indian

subcontinent, is an omnivorous bird known to occupy a wide range of habitats such as dry scrub forests, grasslands, gardens, and agricultural fields (Gabadage et al. 2015). RVB is easily identified by its short crest which gives the head a squarish appearance. The body is dark brown with a scaly pattern while the head is darker or black. The rump is white, the vent is red, and the black tail is white-tipped. Both the sexes are similar in plumage.

The habitat where the bird was spotted was dry scrub forest with upcoming human habitations and interrupted agricultural fields. The temperature here ranges from 42°C in summer to freezing temperatures during the winter. The Lambasingi hills harbour a wide range of birds year-round, including a few migrant species.

Leucism and progressive greying are usually confused with each other and are hard to distinguish in field conditions. Progressive greying is defined as the progressive loss of pigment cells with age (Grouw 2013). In this case too, at first, the bird's white features gave rise to similar confusions. On further detailed study of the flight images of the bird, however, it was confirmed to be a case of leucism.

Leucistic individuals of RVB were incorrectly documented in the early years. For instance, Joshua (1996) reported a leucistic RVB as a case of albinism. A few melanistic cases have been reported in RVB before (Berry 1894; Law 1921). Recently, an albino RVB was reported from Sri Lanka (Gabadage et al. 2015).

In March 2016, a similar leucistic RVB was photographed in Masinagudi, Tamil Nadu. The find was not properly documented though the experience was presented in a blog (Vidjit Photography, 2016).

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Acknowledgements: I thank Mr. Janardhan Uppada, bird-watcher from Visakhapatnam for the arrangements made for the birding trip. I thank Mrs. Nagamaneswari DCF, AP and Dr. Selvam, DFO, Visakhapatnam, for providing ambient accommodation facilities throughout the study period.

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Citation: Venugopal, B. & V.N. Rathod (2019). A case of partial albinism/leucism in Red-vented Bulbul *Pycnonotus cafer* (Aves: Passeriformes: Pycnonotidae) from Visakhapatnam, Andhra Pradesh, India. *Bird-o-soar* #32, In: *Zoo's Print* 34(9): 12–13.