



## A leucistic Northern Palm Squirrel from Dehradun, India



A leucistic Northern Palm Squirrel *Funambulus pennantii* from Dehradun, northern India.

The Northern Palm Squirrel or the Five-striped Squirrel *Funambulus pennantii* Wroughton, 1905 is a common squirrel in northern India. This species is characterised by five light coloured stripes on the back; three median pale stripes flanked on each side with a supplementary pale stripe; the dorsal pelage ranges from greyish-brown to almost black, while the head is usually greyish to reddish-brown; the tail alone makes up about half of the total body length; the head and body length ranges 13–16 cm and tail length 14–16 cm (Alfred et al. 2006; Menon 2014). In India, it is distributed in central, northern and northeastern regions, Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka, and elsewhere in Bangladesh,

Iran, Nepal and Pakistan (Molur et al. 2005; Wilson & Reeder 2005). It is gregarious, mostly arboreal living with up to 10 other individuals in the same tree; herbivorous and omnivorous in diet; feed on seeds, nuts, buds, young bark, leaves, insects, flowers and grubs; its habitats include grasslands, scrublands, plantations and tropical to subtropical dry deciduous forests (Molur et al. 2005; Nameer & Molur 2016).

Recently, one of the authors (MK) sighted a white Palm Squirrel at the IIRS campus, near the Golden Jubilee hostel, IIRS, Dehradun, Uttarakhand, India (30.340°N & 78.046°E, altitude 702m; on 01 July 2019).



The squirrel was identified as a leucistic Northern Palm Squirrel based on the visible characters such as the body was completely white from head to tail with pinkish snout, normal eyes (black colour) and very pale stripes on its dorsal pelage.

Leucism is defined as a complete lack of pigmentation in the entire body and showing whitish hair and pale skin but eyes are normal in colour. This happens due to an inherited defect in the pigment transfer process (van Grouw 2006; Lucati & Lopez-Baucells 2016; Mahabal 2019). Recently, Mahabal et al. (2019) reported the records of various types of coloured aberrations of 56 species of Indian mammals including *Funambulus pennantii*. Leucism in *F.*

*pennantii* have previously been reported from Kolkata, West Bengal (Agrawal & Chakraborty 1979), and Satara District, Maharashtra (Sayyed & Mahabal 2016); recently from Ghazipur District, Uttar Pradesh (Yadav 2019) and few albinism records from Chandigarh (Chaturvedi & Ghose 1984), Udaipur City, Rajasthan (Sharma 2004), Sindhudurg District, Maharashtra (Mahabal et al. 2005), northern Udaipur, Rajasthan (Mehra et al. 2007, 2010), and Kutch, Gujarat (Newnham 1886). Dehradun is the capital city of Uttarakhand state in northern India and is located in the Doon Valley on the foothills of the Himalaya and is geographically different from other areas.



The red mark indicates the observation of leucistic Northern Palm Squirrel *Funambulus pennantii* from Dehradun (Source: Bhuvan portal).

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