Observation of ostracism in an albino Spotted Deer

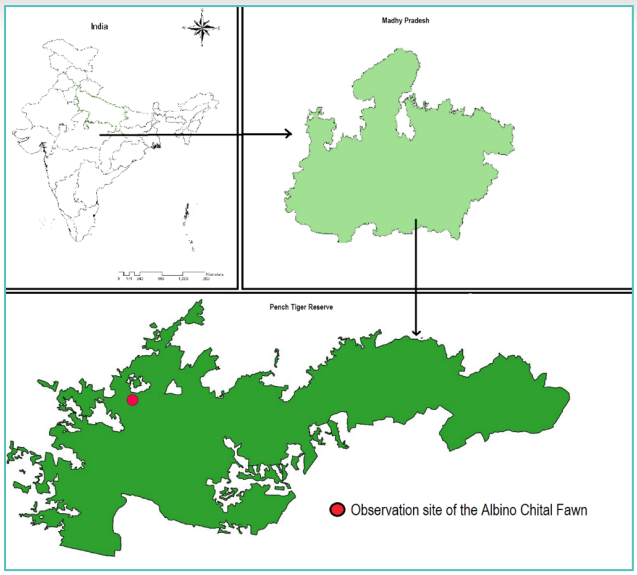
An albino-Chital standing alone on forest road of Gomtara Range of Pench National Park, Madhya Pradesh, India. © Dimpi Patel.

The third largest deer in India, Chital or Spotted Deer *Axis axis* (Erxleben, 1777) (Mammalia: Artiodactyla: Cervidae) occupies plains and undulating terrain with a reddish coat in the case of fawns, spotted with white and white underparts for the adult (Sankar & Acharya 2004). Chital is endemic to South Asia, occurring in India, Sri Lanka, Nepal and Bangladesh (Prater 1934; Schaller 1967). In India, the Spotted Deer are found in diversified forest types such as dry deciduous, moist deciduous, thorn and mangrove forests (Sankar & Acharya 2004).

Chitals are basically social ungulates and their basic social unit normally consists of an adult female, offspring from the previous year, and fawns (Ables 1974). The herd usually consist of two or more social units accompanied by individuals of mixed sex and age-classes (Sankar & Acharya 2004).

Albinism is a general scientific terminology which describes conditions characterized by hypopigmentation of skin resulting in snow white body with pink limbs, snout, and ears (Menon 2003; Hayashi & Suzuki 2018). Albino animals have several drawbacks in the wild such as being prone to be located easily and accordingly turn out to be an easy prey and their unusual appearances might be the cause of rejection by other individuals of the same species (Singh 2010).

Albinism in Chital has been recorded in different parts of India (Atkinson 1932;



Study area where described individual was observed.

Ramsingh 1942; Smielowski 1987; Singh 1996; Prabhu et al. 2013; Mohan 2014; Pradhan et al. 2014; Sayyed et al. 2015). In addition to this an albino fawn was observed standing alone on a forest road of Gomtara Range of Pench National Park, Madhya Pradesh, India (21.831^{0}N & 79.242^{0}E) on 1st February 2014 at 1559 hours. The animal was found to be alone for about 5 minutes and no other animals or herd were seen in the vicinity during the observation time. The previous published observations of albino Chital fawns from India show that the fawn was found either with the herd or with the mother. (Prabhu et al. 2013; Pradhan et al. 2014; Sayyed et al. 2015). Moreover, during the sighting period, no presence of any herd or other sympatric ungulates was noticed for about a kilometre distance. The conspecifics of the observed albino Chital fawn may have rejected the fawn from the herd due to its abnormal appearance (McCardle 2012; Slavik et al. 2015). To the author's knowledge this is the first photographic evidence of ostracism in an albino Spotted Deer fawn.

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