

First record of melanism in Rhesus Macaque from India



Rhesus Macaque *Macaca mulatta* (Zimmermann, 1780) is the most widespread of all Indian primates. They live in close association with humans and use a quite diverse habitat like temple surrounds, urban areas, rural areas, pond side, roadsides, and forests. They are brown in colour with fur varying from very thick and dark in Kashmir to sparse sandy brown in Rajasthan, the orangish tint to the fur on the hindquarters is also present and is constant (Menon 2014).

Light to dark coat colour variation is a common aspect of colour diversity within and across mammalian taxa but very little is known about the genetic mechanisms underlying light and dark differences in pelage pigmentation in mammals (Bradley et al. 2013). Melanism is a condition when there is an increased amount of black or nearly black pigmentation of melanin (on skin, feathers or hairs) of an individual (Lucati & Lopez-Baucells 2017; Mahabal et al. 2016).

During a field survey on 16 February 2019 at 1224 h, I recorded and photographed a young melanistic individual (Image 1a,b) of Rhesus Macaque along with normal coloured adult in an Assam temple, popularly known as monkey temple in the district of North Lakhimpur of Assam



Image 1a&b. The melanistic individual of Rhesus Macaque at the Monkey Temple in Assam, India.
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(27.0022°N, 93.9842°E). This melanistic female individual was found sitting near the temple boundaries with three other males. As soon I went a little close to get some more photographs the troop started running towards the forest patch behind the temple.

The information and records of melanism in Rhesus Macaque is extremely scanty. While going through literature, we find considerable reported cases of albinism (Bahadur 1942; Singh & Mohnot 2009; Mahabal et al. 2019) from India. But we could not find any reported case of melanism in Rhesus Macaque from India. To the best of our knowledge, this is the first record of melanism in Rhesus Macaque *Macaca mulatta* from India.

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