

Record of albino Indian Flapshell Turtle from Pune, Maharashtra, India

The Indian Flapshell Turtle *Lissemys punctata* (Bonnaterre, 1789) is a soft-shell turtle belonging to the family Trionychidae of the order Testudines. It is a freshwater turtle and found in ponds, rivers, and lakes all across India and also distributed in other parts of the Indian subcontinent. It is an omnivore that feeds mainly on aquatic vegetation, plant leaves, fruits, and small aquatic animals (Bhupathy et al. 2014). The Indian Flapshell Turtle is protected under Schedule I Part II of Indian Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972 as amended up to 2013 (WLPA 2013).

On 28 July 2019 at 1230 h, a school student Master Vinayak Lokhande located a turtle on the side of a runnel near Aundh Chowk (18.562°N & 73.828°E), Pune, Maharashtra. The runnel is a tributary of 'Mula' River which flows through the Pune City. Being a bright off-white color, it caught the boy's attention and he informed us (ALIVE - UV & RK) about the turtle, as we are working for nature conservation through our non-government organization. After reaching there, we closely observed the live turtle and took photographs of it for further studies. Its carapace was depressed and oval in shape like in adults. Femoral flaps on plastron were intact. Limbs and forehead not scaled. Three clawed fore and hind limbs (webbed). Lack of scutes on the shell and carapace was covered with skin. From the key characters



Albino Indian Flapshell Turtle *Lissemys punctata* from Pune, Maharashtra. © Rajendra Kamble.

like femoral flaps, nasal septal ridges and shell closure mechanism, we confirm it as Indian Flapshell Turtle (Webb 1982; Sharma 1998; Hanfee 1999).

The turtle was an albino as the whole body colour was off white or yellowish in colour and both of its eyes were red in colour. There were not any dark pigmentation patches or spots on carapace, plastron, limbs, head, neck or any part of its body. Subsequently,



we informed about the observation of albino turtle to the Forest Department of Maharashtra, Pune Division.

Albinism is a congenital disorder and it is characterized by lack of melanin pigment (Rufus 2009). In general, it is well known that albinism can occur for a number of reasons aside from inheritance, including genetic mutations, diet, living conditions, age, disease or injury. Albinism can be seen rarely in many animal species. Albinism can reduce the survivability of an animal due to the lack of protection from UV rays and lack of camouflage to avoid predators.

The perusal of literature revealed a few instances of albino Indian Flapshell Turtle reported from Nagpur, Maharashtra (D'Abreu 1928), Himmatnagar, Gujarat (Vyas 1997), Chennai, Tamil Nadu (Rufus 2009), Kozhikode, Kerala (Palot & Radhakrishnan 2004). These instances have also been reported in a review paper on colour aberrations in Indian herpetofauna by Mahabal & Thakur (2014). Accordingly, herewith we report this as a second record of albino Indian Flapshell Turtle from Maharashtra after 92 years of the very first record of albino turtle found from the state.

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