

Report of partially leucistic Lesser Whistling-Duck from West Bengal, India

Lesser Whistling-Duck *Dendrocygna javanica* is a medium-sized duck belonging to the family Anatidae. It is a widespread resident in the Indian subcontinent and is mostly found in freshwater marshes, shallow ponds, and lakes with emergent vegetations (Grimmett et al. 2011). It was listed as 'Least Concern' in the IUCN Red List assessment (Birdlife International 2016). It has a pale brown overall colouration with greyish-buff colour on the head and neck region, darker brown crown and nape, presence of chestnut-fringed feathers on the back, warmer chestnut colour underparts, chestnut upper tail coverts and dark grey bill and legs (Grimmett et al. 2011).

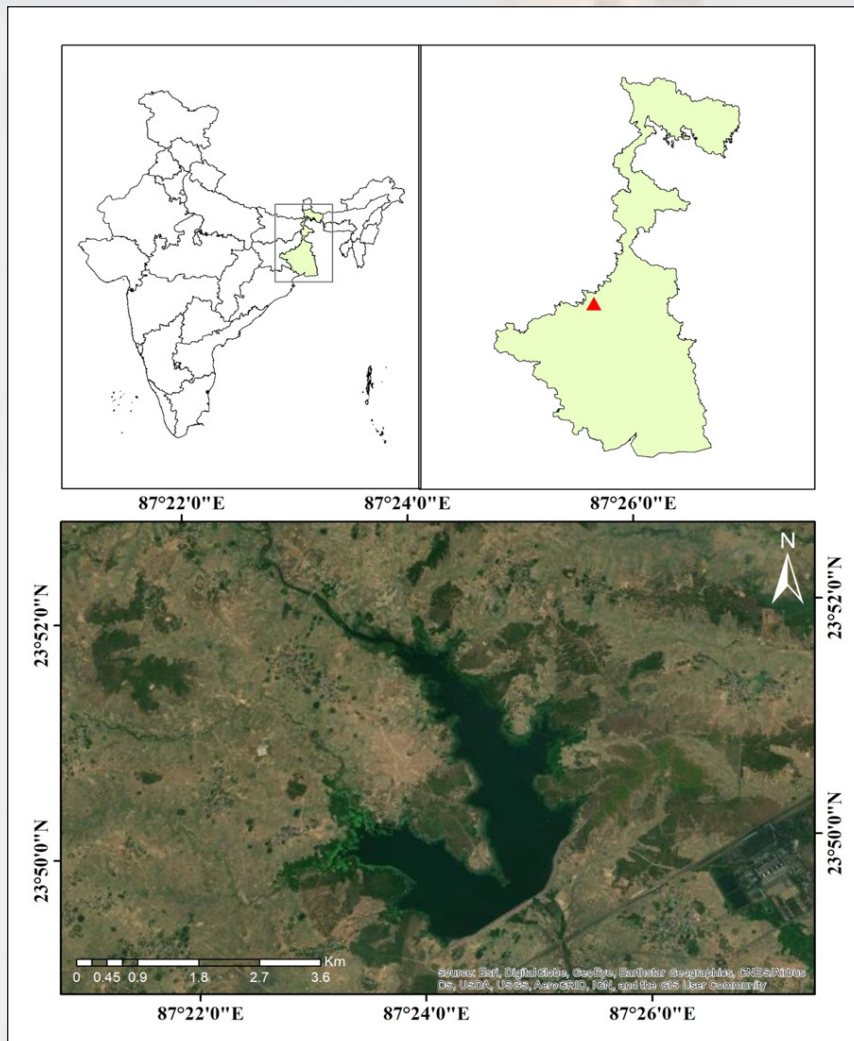
On 13 February 2021, while birding at Bakreswar Dam, Birbhum (23.83°N, 87.42°E), we observed an abnormal coloured duck in the dam amongst a big flock of about 100 individuals of Lesser Whistling-Ducks. We took photographs of the abnormally coloured



Partially leucistic Lesser Whistling-Duck amongst normal coloured Lesser Whistling-Ducks from Bakreswar Reservoir, Birbhum. © Subhadeep Saha on 13 February 2021.

individual. The duck was identified on the basis of its medium size, shape, beak structure, flight patterns, and call as Lesser Whistling-Duck. The individual was not normally coloured, it had the following characters: the crown was light brown instead of the dark brown colour; the buff greyish colour of the head and neck was replaced by mostly off whitish colour; the mantle and the tail had some normal chestnut coloured feathers; abdomen had a tinge of light chestnut shade instead of the warmer

chestnut underparts; rest of the body is mostly off whitish in colouration with a very little proportion of normal feathers in place of pale brown overall colouration, but eyes and beak were grey in colour like a normal individual. These characters clearly indicated that the bird we observed was partially leucistic. Incidentally, the third author also observed an individual with similar condition at forest lake 3, Ballavpur Wildlife Sanctuary, Birbhum (23.68°N, 87.66°E) on 25 January 2019. Leucism, a most common



Location from where the partially leucistic Lesser Whistling-Duck was observed.

variety of colour aberration in case of birds, can be defined as a condition which is related with the partial or total lack of the melanin pigments from the feathers. This phenomenon can vary from a few white feathers (partially leucistic) to totally white individuals (completely leucistic) (Grouw 2006). Leucistic birds are more noticeable than the normal coloured counterparts; there is a bigger risk of

predation. Moreover, it is also reported that these colour aberrant individuals, in occasional cases, may not be recognised or accepted by its potential mating partner (Mayntz 2020). Leucism is quite well documented in case of birds from India as well as from West Bengal, such as, Kalij Pheasant *Lophura leucomelanos* (Thareja & Thareja 2017), Collared Kingfisher *Todiramphus*

chloris (Adhikary & Mondal 2019), Jungle Myna *Acridotheres fuscus* (Nandy 2019), Brown Crake *Zapornia akool* (Byatroy 2019), Indian Peafowl *Pavo cristatus* (Yadav & Arigela 2020), House Sparrow *Passer domesticus* (Bera et al. 2021). The aberrations in colouration due to conditions like leucism and albinism is also well reported for the members of the family Anatidae from India like in Red-crested Pochard *Netta rufina* (Mahajan 2016), Garganey *Anas querquedula* (Karuthedathu et al. 2014), Knob-billed Duck *Sarkidiornis melanotos* (Newnham & Aitken 1886), Ruddy Shelduck *Tadorna ferruginea* (Karuthedathu et al. 2014), Gadwall *Anas strepera* (Harrison & Harrison 1972), Indian Spot-billed Duck *Anas poecilorhyncha* (Raju 2017) and in many others. A previous report on the albinism in case of Lesser Whistling-Duck is available from India (Chatterjee 1995) but there are no reports on the leucism of Lesser Whistling-Ducks till date from West Bengal. So, in this backdrop, this report forms the first ever observation record of leucistic Lesser Whistling Duck from

West Bengal. But as we have observed this bird only once during our study, it is hard to tell if this particular bird also had to face hard challenges in mating, camouflage, feather weakening or not. More detailed and prolonged study on the birds with abnormal colouration from West Bengal and India is needed which will surely unveil various new information about them.

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