

Record of colour aberrant Jungle Babbler from West Bengal coast, India



Colour aberrant Jungle Babbler from Shankarpur, Purba Medinipur, West Bengal, India. Photographs taken on A - 10.ii.2020 and B - 13.xi.2019.
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Jungle Babbler *Argya striata* is a member of the family Leiothrichidae and is commonly found in the Indian subcontinent. These birds are gregarious in nature and generally foraging in small groups of 6–10 individuals. During birding in coastal area of Shankarpur (21.636°N, 87.571°E, 15m), Purba Medinipur District, West Bengal, India, on 13 November 2019, at 1545 h, a single individual of colour aberrant Jungle Babbler *Argya striata* was spotted among the flock of normal coloured Jungle Babbler. Initially they were busy foraging on the ground among the bushy

shrubs of *Clerodendrum*. Later, the moment I reached closer to them, they flew away and sat on a *Casuarina* tree branch.

The individual was partially white. Bill, eyes, and feet were normal in colour. Crown, ear coverts, chin, and throat had normal coloured feathers. Mantle, back and rump were patchily white. Breast and belly to vent with white feathers. Tip and edges of the tail white, while upper parts of tail normal greyish-brown. In the field, it is very difficult to differentiate progressive greying

and leucism in birds (van Grouw 2013). To ascertain the exact aberrant form of the bird (whether the individual is progressive greying or leucistic), I visited the place of sighting a few times, and again encountered the colour aberrant individual on 10 February 2020, at 1600 h, among the flock of normal coloured Jungle Babbler where it was previously sighted.

After taking some photographs, I checked the plumage colour pattern with the photographs of previous individual. The white patches looked similar and confirmed both of the sightings as the same colour aberrant Jungle Babbler. According to van Grouw (2013) and Mahabal et al. (2016) classification, in case of leucistic bird white patterns are in general patchy and bilaterally symmetrical. Presence of some white feathers on the face and a few white outer primaries are typical characteristic for leucism. However, in case of early progressive graying stage, white feathers are randomly spread and with the aging after every moult, white feathers will increase (van Grouw 2013; Mahabal et al. 2016).

Jungle Babbler moult their body and flight feathers once every year (Zacharias 1979). Moult of body and flight feathers usually occurs at a very slow pace for longer duration from February to November (Zacharias 1979; Zacharias & Mathew 1988). In flight feathers, the moult of the primaries and upper coverts occur from the proximal to the distal end. In the secondaries moult begins from both ends, and in the tertiaries,

moult occurs less frequently without any temporal relation to the progress of moult in the rest of the flight feathers (Zacharias 1979). The plumage colour of the adult birds remains the same throughout the year, as moult is not temporally separated from breeding.

However, the timing of present observations (13 November 2019; 10 February 2020) does not fall under the usual moulting period of Jungle Babbler. Through the examination of photographs taken during present observations, increase in white feathers was not observed. The white patches look same after a gap of about 89 days of first sighting. But close examinations of body and flight feathers for longer time span during moulting period were required for the confirmation of moult and increasing in white feathers. Thus, it becomes very difficult to conclude the exact colour aberrant form, regarding these present observations from West Bengal coast.

Although rare, in India a few records are available on colour aberrant Jungle Babbler from Gujarat (Newnham 1886); Maharashtra (Janakiraman & Prasad 1961; Pande et al. 2003; Sani & Kasambe 2007) and Madhya Pradesh (Gupte 1969). But the case of leucism in Jungle Babbler has only been reported once from Maharashtra (Sani & Kasambe 2007) and the rest are the cases of progressive greying and melanism (Mahabal et al. 2016). Hitherto, no published records are available concerning colour aberration in Jungle Babbler from eastern India,

particularly from West Bengal (Mahabal et al. 2016). Hence, this present report may prove to be the first photographic record of a colour aberrant Jungle Babbler from West Bengal.

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