

## Sighting of a leucistic Stork-billed Kingfisher from coastal West Bengal, India

On 30 May 2020 morning during my regular field study, I observed an abnormally coloured Kingfisher sitting on a tree in Kanai Chatta, Purba Medinipur, West Bengal, India (21.7738 N & 87.8754E).

By noticing a large body size kingfisher, large size bill, and after listening to the call, I concluded that it was Stork-billed Kingfisher (S-bK). It was abnormal in colour. It had the following characteristics: very large coral red colour bill, legs yellowish or pinkish colour, eyes were dark in colour, collar and underparts of body were tinge pale orange-buff colour and remaining body parts were white colour. In general features of Stork-billed Kingfisher is a very large with a huge coral-red bill, brownish cap, pale orange-buff collar and underparts and blue-green upperparts (Grimmett et al. 2011). It is well distributed in India, Nepal, Sikkim, Bangladesh, Thailand, Myanmar, and Indonesia (Ali & Ripley 1970). These characteristic features clearly



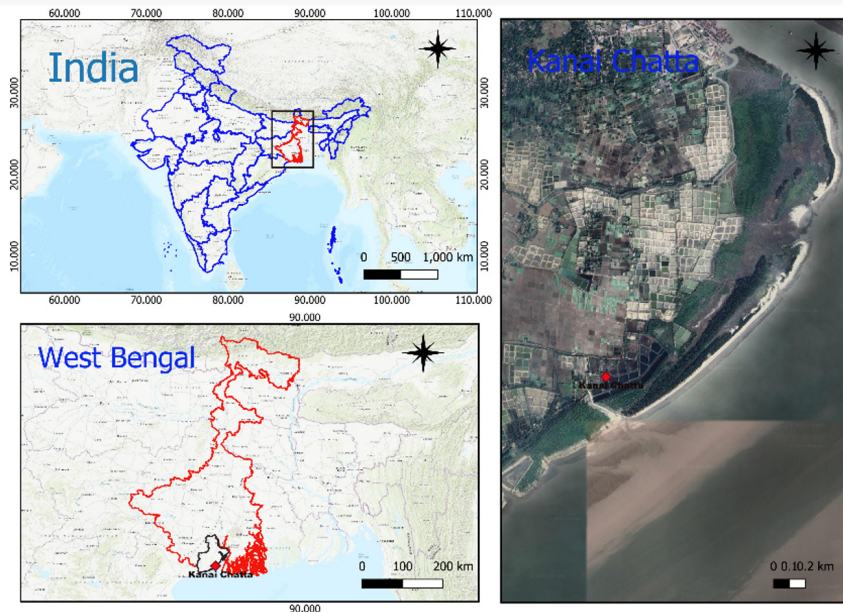
Leucistic Stork-billed Kingfisher *Pelargopsis capensis* in Kanai Chatta, Purba, Medinipur. © Piklu Das.

indicated that this individual is 100% leucistic because of the total absence of melanin from all feathers. But melanin is still present in skin, iris and feathers also. It means carotenoid-based colours are still present (Grouw 2006). It is not albinism because melanin is still present in the collar and underparts, eyes are not red, and the bill is still coloured like normal S-bK.

Colour aberration on kingfisher is quite well documented in India as well as in West Bengal, i.e., an albinism White-

throated Kingfisher *Halcyon smyrnensis* was reported from Adilabad, Arunachal Pradesh (Srinivasulu 2004); a colour aberrant kingfisher was sighted from Andaman Island (Hariprasad 2018); a colour aberrant Pied Kingfisher *Ceryle rudis* from Chennai, Tamil Nadu (Raghavan 2019); a residential Collard Kingfisher *Todiramphus chloris* was reported from Sundarban, West Bengal (Patra 2021); Common Kingfisher *Alcedo atthis* was sighted from Udaipur, Rajasthan (Rathore & Sexena 2022).

Previous sighting record of



Location where the leucistic Stork-billed Kingfisher was observed.

colour aberrant S-bK was from Sodepur, North 24 Parganas (Saha 2018). Again a leucistic S-bK was sighted from Nandigram, East Medinipur, West Bengal (Bera 2022). But there are no published accounts as of yet about colour aberrant S-bK from India.

It is noteworthy that leucistic individuals have lower survival rates than normally coloured individuals, because they are more easily detected by predators (Owen & Skimmings 1992). Owen & Skimmings (1992) studied a population of barnacle geese with a number of leucistic individuals and found the median lifespan of leucistic geese was only 2–3 years compared to 8–10

years for normally pigmented birds. Leucism in seabirds has also been attributed to deficiencies in diet (Castillo-Guerrero et al. 2005). Clapp (1974) considered leucism to be related to inadequate diet in Common Blackbirds *Turdus merula* and associated with white-wing bars in Wild Turkeys *Meleagris gallopavo*. It is also reported that these colour aberrant individuals, in occasional cases, may not be recognised or accepted by their potential mating partner (Mayntz 2020).

In conclusion, researchers should be encouraged to report records of colour-aberrant animals in wildlife in order to better understand the

phenomenon and we have to gain insights into the ecological and physiological implications of that condition, which has a significant effect directly or indirectly on their survival.

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