

A melanistic Pond Heron *Ardeola grayii* in Assam

Melanism is the increased development of the dark-coloured pigment melanin in the skin and feather of a bird (also other animals, especially mammals). In such cases the animals look much darker than the normal colour phases. I here report a melanistic Pond Heron *Ardeola grayii*.

In the month of November 2023, in 'kabristan' (graveyard) located in Islampur locality (26.179 N, 91.760 E, 47 m) of Guwahati city in Assam, on at least three days I observed a Pond Heron that surprised me. Its size, shape and activities were like that of a Pond Heron but it looked different. It had whitish wings but its saddle was dark blackish-brown which in a normal bird is brown (non-breeding) and maroon-brown (breeding). Head and neck striped like normal Pond Heron but with deeper and lighter blackish-brown or deep grey. There were also light-coloured streaks on scapulars. Bill was also dark with some yellow streaks on lower mandible. Wings were whitish like in normal Pond Heron. I first noticed it on 10 November



A dark-phased (possible partially-melanistic) Pond Heron *Ardeola grayii* in Islampur kabristan, Guwahati. ©Anwaruddin Choudhury.

2023, then on 11 November, I photographed it with mobile. On 15 November, I took some good photographs with a DSLR. It was standing on the banks of a 'nullah' flowing down from a

small hillock. It was also often seen wading along the nullah itself. My next visit was on 30 November when I did not see it. In case of Indian Pond Heron there are no reports of any

melanism so far (Mahabal et al. 2016). There are reports of melanistic Green Heron *Butorides virescens* from Cuba (McLachlan 2011). Albinism and melanism are generally rare but occurs in many species. Such aberrations have been reviewed recently (Mahabal et al. 2016), who summarised by stating that the review showed that brown and progressive greying are the most common colour aberrations in Indian birds, while albinos were seldom encountered in the wild. They also mentioned that melanism is easier to identify than albinism.

References

Mahabal, A., H. van Grouw, R.M. Sharma & S. Thakur (2016). How common is albinism really? Colour

aberrations in Indian birds reviewed. *Dutch Birding* 38: 301–309.

McLachlan, A. (2011). Melanistic Green Herons *Butorides virescens* in Cuba. *Journal of Heron Biology and Conservation* 1:1[online] www.HeronConservation.org/JHBCvol1/art01/.

Anwaruddin Choudhury

House No. 7, Islampur Road, Guwahati, Assam 781007, India.

Email: acbadru56@gmail.com

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