

A partially leucistic male Shikra in Udaipur, Rajasthan

The Shikra *Accipiter badius* is a small-sized member of the family Accipitridae. The species is categorized into 'Least Concern' on the IUCN Red List (BirdLife International 2021). It is found across Sub-Saharan Africa, the Middle East, and southern & southeastern Asia (Kemp & Kirwan 2024). It is one of the most commonly occurring raptors in the Indian subcontinent. Shikras inhabit forests, woodlands, and open areas such as savannas, shrublands, and grasslands. They can also be found in farmlands, plantations, gardens, and in urban areas. A recent assessment of India's birds (SOIB 2020) estimates that the population of the Shikra has remained stable over the past two decades. Adult males have a reddish iris, blue-grey upperparts and fine brownish-orange barring on underparts. Females have a yellowish iris, and brownish upperparts apart from heavier barring on the underparts. Both have narrow

dark barring on the tail. The females are slightly larger.

Colour aberrations are common among organisms. These aberrations can be heritable (due to genetic mutation) or non-heritable (due to disease, nutritional deficiency, trauma, and environmental pollution) (van Grouw 2013). The six commonest heritable colour aberrations are albinism, leucism, brown, dilution, ino, and melanism (Mahabal et al. 2016). Leucism identified as the most common type of colour aberrations in numerous Indian avian species (Guay et al. 2012). There were a few published reports about aberrant colour in raptors from India. The albino changeable Hawk-Eagle was discovered in Rajasthan's Sitamata Wildlife Sanctuary (Parashar & Sharma 2010). Only a single instance of complete leucism in female Shikra has been reported near Pavagadh Hill,



Partially leucistic male Shikra. © Anil Kumar Sharma.

Gujarat (Upadhyay et al. 2023). Here, we document the first leucism in male Shikra.

On 21 July 2024, at 1106 h the first and second authors were birding in the urban areas of Udaipur City (Rajasthan). Near Bhuwana Circle 24.3724 N & 73.4234 E, they observed a single pale-coloured bird flying on the main road to another side and perching on an electricity wire. Several photographs of this interesting individual were taken using a Nikon P900 camera. The bird was observed for approximately 15 minutes until it disappeared. It was identified as a Shikra, with normally coloured legs and beak, yellow-orange eyes, and an off-white base around the beak. Unlike normal individuals, it has a completely white belly and partially white remiges (wing feathers) as well as rectrices (tail feathers). As the reddish colour of iris can be recognised; it is a male one. From the above observations, it has been clear that the bird was a partially leucistic male Shikra.

In this predatory species, leucism may be beneficial for camouflage while searching for prey. Such colour aberrations are originated from abnormal embryonic development (mutation) (Sharma & Tripathi 2024), and identifying colour mutations in the field can be extremely challenging (van Grouw 2013).

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