

Even the lightest coloured individuals of *leucocephala* still have a greyish head as the feathers still contain melanin pigment. This bird has bright white feathers without any melanin left. Two sorts of aberrations can cause feathers without any melanin next to normal pigmented feathers; Leucism and Progressive Greying.

Progressive Greying will affect plumage all over the individual, and most forms do not affect the skin colour much. An example of such a bird you can find on this website: <https://www.shanghaibirding.com/wagtail-shanghai/>

This bird from Shanghai is not a *leucocephala*. The yellow feathers on the bird's back are feathers without melanin but, obviously still with the yellow carotenoid pigment (the melanin together with the carotenoid gives the green colour). However, Leucism often affects the 'extremities' of the body and it affects both the melanin pigmentation of the feathers and the skin. As the melanin pigments are missing in the head area both the plumage and the bill are (almost) without it. Also, the feet, what are extremities have no melanin pigment due to the mutation and even the feathers just above the heel (above the bare part of the feet) are without melanin. Normally these feathers are dark coloured (melanin), but in this individual they are bright white. I would not be surprised if this bird also had a few white feathers in the outer wing area (the 'hand'). The 'alula area' also seems to have some white feathers, indicating that it is indeed an aberration.

Due to the mutation it looks like a White-headed (*leucocephala*) Yellow Wagtail. It may be that subspecies, but then also, affected by Leucism. However, as it seems that the neck of this bird is also very bright yellow, suggesting that the melanin is also lacking in the neck area and therefore the remaining yellow carotenoid pigments show brighter, it is more likely that this is an aberrant individual of the subspecies what is most likely to occur in Gujarat.

The mutation here is likely Leucism but could also be probably Progressive Greying'.

Looking at the detailed reply received from Hein Van Grouw, it was confirmed that this individual was colour aberrant and the likely mutation was Leucism or Progressive Greying. However, due to the mutation, it could not be confirmed whether this bird was of the subspecies *leucocephala*. However, this is an interesting record of a colour aberrant Western Yellow Wagtail from Gujarat and it is surprising that if this individual was not of the subspecies *leucocephala*, then the aberration caused it to look very similar to individuals of this subspecies.

We are extremely grateful to Hein Van Grouw for explaining the identification of this bird in detail – Eds].

References

Rasmussen, P. C., & Anderton, J. C., 2012. *Birds of South Asia: The Ripley guide*. 2 nd Ed. Smithsonian Institution and Lynx Edicions. Washington, D.C. and Barcelona. □

Sighting of Oriental Pied Hornbill *Anthracoceros albirostris* in Surat

Vidhi Patel: Surat.



upperparts and I identified it as a female Oriental Pied Hornbill (*Anthracoceros albirostris*) based on the bill with extensive black on upper mandible and black cutting edges. It soon took an elegant flight through the street, from which I confirmed its plumage and black-tipped casque. After 20 minutes, it was dusk and it vanished in the back streets. The next morning, at around 07:30 hrs, it was last sighted in the same region, feeding on *Asopalav* (*Polyalthia longifolia*) fruits. I took some photographs of this bird and confirmed the identification.

The Oriental Pied Hornbill belongs to the *Bucerotidae* family. According to IUCN Red list of Threatened species, it is a least concerned species. It can be identified by its black tail with white tips on all except the central tail feathers. It has a black-tipped casque, black cutting edges to bill, and black of neck extending to centre of breast (Rasmussen & Anderton 2012). It is quite similar to the Malabar Pied Hornbill (*Anthracoceros coronatus*), which has a forward pointing casque, all white outer retrices and elongated black central tail feathers.

On 21 March 2020, at around 19:00 hrs, in Adajan area of Surat (21° 11' 47" N, 72° 47' 16" E), I chanced upon an odd-looking, large, blackish bird in the canopy of a rain tree, being chased by a group of crows (*Corvus* sp.). It was a hornbill with black

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Oriental Pied Hornbill....

The Oriental Pied Hornbill is resident in the Himalayan foothills, Northeast India and eastern India, and in some parts of east-central India (Grimmett *et al.* 2011). Its habitat is riverine forests, tropical and subtropical moist lowland forests as well as rural areas with trees; it is seen around cultivation and it more tolerant to habitat disturbance than other hornbill species. Encountering such a species, within Surat city, was quite surprising. However, Adajan area has large fruiting trees like Almond (*Terminalia catappa*), Baobab, Bael (*Aegle marmelos*), Asopalav, Tamarind, Sapodilla (*Manilkara zapota*), Java plum (*Syzygium cumini*), Mango (*Mangifera indica*) and a variety of *Ficus* species. The Oriental Pied Hornbill is an omnivore and its diet consists mainly of fruits, supplemented by birds and animals (e.g., small birds, eggs, lizards, snakes, bats, squirrels, arthropods, snails, crabs etc.).

The nearest sighting of Oriental Pied Hornbill from this area is from Panna National Park in Madhya Pradesh (as per eBird map), which is more than 800 kms from Surat. If the bird was a vagrant, then the possibility of its occurrence in the Dangs or nearby forests of Western Ghats should also be considered. However, no sightings have been reported from these areas so far. It remains a mystery as to how this individual reached Surat.

[The Oriental Pied Hornbill is not included in the checklist of the birds of Gujarat (Ganpule 2020). This sighting is intriguing, as it is quite far from the known range of the species. The Oriental Pied Hornbill is present in some zoos of Gujarat; Vyas (2002) reported its successful breeding in Sayaji Baug Zoo and three birds were procured from a private dealer for this.

A wider discussion with senior birdwatchers here was initiated and the majority opinion suggested that this record may be treated as of a bird of 'unknown origin' as it is possible that this individual could be an escapee and not a genuine wild vagrant and it should not be accepted into the Gujarat checklist until there is further evidence, especially some proof that the species is expanding its range or has been seen in areas where it was not noted before. Hence, the Oriental Pied Hornbill is not accepted into the Gujarat checklist at present – Eds]

Acknowledgements

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to my supervisors Mukesh Bhatt, Pratik Parmar and Krunal Trivedi for invaluable guidance. I would also like to thank WECT and Nature Club Surat for giving me endless support.

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Purple Swamphen *Porphyrio porphyrio* preying of chick of Brown Crake *Zapornia akool*

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On 9 May 2021, a Sunday, we were on our routine birding in the downstream area of Nyari-II Dam, in a reedy vegetation patch, with co-birders Sandeep Nandani and Chetan Hansalia.

We saw some feeding activities of Purple Swamphen (*Porphyrio porphyrio*). A Brown Crake (*Zapornia akool*) was chasing and trying to drive away the swamphens; there were five swamphens in the area, probably an adult pair with three immatures. On detailed observation, we found that a swamphen was preying a chick of Brown Crake and one adult bird was protecting the preying swamphen from the Brown Crakes. Finally, the adult bird got the crake chick in its beak and we observed that the birds fought amongst themselves and brutally tore off pieces of the crake chick for their share. They all got some pieces and we could see that one adult fed a young bird.

It was surprising to see the Purple Swamphen prey on the chick of a Brown Crake. The Purple Swamphen is mainly