Colour aberrant Indian Cormorant Phalacrocorax fuscicollis in Kachchh

Nirav Solanki: At - Kachchh. tjniravsolanki@gmail.com



On 12 August 2020, I was birding near Nilpar Village, near Rapar, in Kachchh. It was evening and I saw a white bird from a distance. I approached near to it and saw that it was a 'white' cormorant, perched besides a normal plumaged bird. I identified it as an Indian Cormorant (*Phalacrocorax fuscicollis*) based on the size, bill shape, and other features. Since it was perched besides a normal plumaged bird, the identification was easy. The cormorant was entirely white, except for a few blackish feathers on the mantle and a blackish spot on the earcoverts. I could not identify the correct mutation in this aberrant plumaged cormorant. There have been recent reports of colour aberrant cormorants from Gujarat (Vaghashiya 2016, Joshi & Trivedi 2018) but this is the first time I had seen such a bird here.

[We sent the photo of the aberrant plumaged Indian Cormorant to Hein van Grouw, who stated that 'This aberration results in a plumage without melanin to start with but gradually, over the years, the melanin comes back! It often returns first in the skin (bill and feet) whilst the plumage is still mainly without. The Cormorant appears to be that mutation as its bill and feet are almost fully melanised whilst in the plumage, only a few minor spots are present (because of the coloured skin, it cannot be Leucism, and is not likely to be Progressive Greying either). The 'pinkish' colour is, in my opinion, not pigment but external staining. There is not yet a proper name for mutations in which melanin returns (it is, in fact, the opposite of Progressive Greying). I am still doing research on this type of colour aberration. It would be good if the Cormorant, if still present (and stays present) in the same place, could be observed for a longer period (including several moult cycles) to see whether it will gain more melanin pigment'.

Hence, the author is requested to follow up with the sighting and keep visiting the area to check if this colour aberrant cormorant is still present. If present, then it should be regularly photographed to see if there is any change in its plumage over a several moult cycles and to report back the details to us.

We are very grateful to Hein van Grouw for helping us identify the correct colour mutation in this cormorant – Eds]

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Bill grappling, clashing and courtship behaviour of Indian Grey Hornbill Ocyceros birostris at Manipur Lake, Ahmedabad

Ridham Dave, Priyesh Kumar, Hitesh Chauhan, Jay Pandya & Gaurang Sindhav: Department of Zoology, Biomedical Technology, Human Genetics & Wildlife Biology and Conservation, University School of Sciences, Gujarat University, Ahmedabad 380009. ridhamdave6@gmail.com, priyeshkumar789@gmail.com, chauhanhitesh14198@gmail.com, jpandya102@gmail.com, drgaurang.sindhav@gmail.com

A habitat without biodiversity sounds impossible. Human habitats or urbanization is a major alter in biodiversity due to strong, permanent, and self-centred human efforts (McKinney 2006, Fontana *et al.* 2011). Urban ecosystems can be of high value for a wide variety of organisms, especially avifauna, and the example Indian Grey Hornbill (*Ocyceros birostris*) can be given. It is the only hornbill species that can be seen and successfully breeds in an urban area also (Kasambe *et al.* 2011).

The Indian Grey Hornbill is widely distributed across India (Grimmett *et al.* 2011) but being sensitive to habitat alteration, it is heading towards local extinction in some areas (Trivedi & Soni 2016). It is a silvery-grey and white bird with a long-graduated tail; its bill is a blackish or greyish with a casque, which is seen in the *Bucerotidae* family, extending up to the point of the inflexion in the bill. They are mostly found in open forest and wooded areas with fruiting trees. Some species of

....Indian Grey Hornbill

hornbills may play an important role in seed dissemination and regeneration of trees, and so, their absence would significantly affect several other avian species and can gradually impair the ecosystem (Savard *et al.* 1999, Santhoshkumar *et al.* 2011).

The observations presented here are from the Manipur Lake (23° 02' 04" N, 72° 25' 27" E), which is situated at the edge of Manipur Village in Sanand Taluka of Ahmedabad, Gujarat. It is a deep-water reservoir situated about 6.2 kms away from Sardar Patel Ring Road, Bopal, Ahmedabad. Three-fourths of the region around Manipur Lake is surrounded by crop fields and one-fourth of the area by houses. The lake area is encircled by many trees, like *Ficus benghalensis* (Banyan), *Syzygium cumini* (Jaambu), *Azadirachta indica* (Neem), *Ficus religiosa* (Peepal) and *Salvadora persica* (Piludi) which were habitually utilised by fruit-eating birds, whereas *Acacia nilotica* (Baval), *Cassia fistula* (Garmala), *Eucalyptus globulus* (Nilgiri), *Zizyphus jujube* (Bor) are important for activities like nesting by birds.



We have been observing many locations to look into the natural surroundings for an urban biodiversity study. On 4 February 2020, we set forth at Manipur Lake and we were very happy to see the Indian Grey Hornbills there. We found that all the hornbills were using only two trees; Peepal and Neem. They came to eat figs which are heavily consumed by hornbills and other frugivores (Kannan *et al.* 1999). After some time, a pair came flying and perched on the Peepal tree. But shortly after that, a second male hornbill came and drove the sitting male away. For a few minutes, they fed on fruits and then flew to rest on an open branch of the Neem tree (Photo 1). The male jumped on and tried to grasp the female with its bill

(Photo 2). The behaviour was photographed. For the first time, we observed the behaviour of bill grappling and bill clashing or kissing, that continued for 2 to 3 minutes and it seemed to be a part of courtship ritual. After half an hour, they flew away and left the lake area. We recorded a total of seven hornbills (4 males and 3 females) in that area. Nesting activity was not observed, nor did we find any nest nearby. As a part of our routine bird watching, we also saw hornbills on 12 February, 25 February and on 1 March at the same site.



According to Kasambe *et al.* (2011), who have extensively studied the Indian Grey Hornbill, bill grappling suggests social play in non-breeders and courtship ritual in breeding pairs. Bill grappling also occurs between two males as agnostic behaviour, but it is intense and almost like a fight. Kasambe (2011) had also observed this behaviour and found that in courtship behaviour, bill-touching between the pairs has been observed. Previously, this species was spotted in this area by Vipul Trivedi in 2017. He remarked that he had found this species after two years of searching at this site. Indian Grey Hornbills have been seen many times in the area of Ahmedabad city. Moreover, at this site, and around this area, we recorded a total of 109 species, including some uncommon species like Egyptian Vulture (Neophron percnopterus). That is what makes the site special. There is an urgent need for further study of the biodiversity of such habitats.

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Indian Grey Hornbill....

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An incidence of brood parasitism: Observations of a juvenile Common Cuckoo Cuculus canorus in Bhavnagar

Vivek Upadhyay: (Add address) Bhavnagar. viveku39@gmail.com



Upadhyay

On 1 September 2020, in the morning at around 09:45 hrs, I was passing through Malnath Hills, Bhavnagar. I noticed one juvenile cuckoo (Cuculus sp.) perched on a tree branch, begging continuously for food. Since cuckoos are brood parasites, I waited to confirm the foster or host parent species. There were no other birds around it but about after 30 minutes, one Long-tailed Shrike (Lanius schach) appeared with some insect prey and fed the young cuckoo. I watched and photographed the cuckoo and the shrike for around two and a half hours, during which it was fed for a total of six times in different locations, ranging from bushes just two feet off the ground to in trees at about 20 ft height. Once, between a long interval in feeding by the parent, the juvenile cuckoo caught a caterpillar on its own. I took many photographs and tentatively identified the cuckoo as a juvenile Common Cuckoo (Cuculus canorus), also known as the Eurasian Cuckoo.



After reviewing the photographs at home, I confirmed the identification as a juvenile of the Common Cuckoo and one of its known host/foster parents is the Long-tailed Shrike. The identification of the cuckoo was confirmed by the yellow eye ring, dark eyes, white nuchal or nape patch and white tips to feathers of upperparts and rump.

I would also like to share two other interesting observations: At one point, the juvenile cuckoo was mobbed by Red-vented Bulbuls (Pycnonotus cafer) and instead of being frightened and