

### Colour aberration (progressive greying) in a Rufous-tailed Lark *Ammomanes phoenicurus* from Gujarat, India

While birding around the Timbi Irrigation Reservoir (22.30°N, 73.29°E), near Vadodara city, on 27 November 2019 at 1030 h, we spotted a bird that resembled a dove, from a distance. Closer observation revealed a graminivorous beak, and a different posture, habits, and size. We were also able to compare it with another similar, normal, individual rummaging and foraging on the ground in its vicinity [40], which helped us confirm that the former was a colour aberrant Rufous-tailed Lark *Ammomanes phoenicurus* (Ali & Ripley 1987; Grimmett et al. 2011; Kazmierczak 2015). We took photographs, and noted aspects of behaviour, for supplementing the bird's identification. The photographs revealed dark lores in normal individual [41], and a clear blackish stripe resembling an eye stripe in the colour aberrant individual [42], which is yet to be affected by the aberration, while the dark lores have probably lost colour and have merged with the white feathers around them. Subsequent visits to the same area for four consecutive days to encounter the individual again, were without any success.



40. Normal Rufous-tailed lark foraging along with colour aberrant Rufous-tailed lark.



41. Normal individual of Rufous-tailed lark.



42. Progressive greying in Rufous-tailed lark.

As it was not easy to infer the correct colour aberration from extant literature, we sent the photographs and our notes to Hein van Grouw, the Senior Curator, Bird Group, Department of Life Sciences, The Natural History Museum, UK (e-mail dated 09 December 2019) who confirmed it to be 'progressive greying'. As per van Grouw (2013) the aberration involved is not leucism, as the white pattern was not patchy or bilaterally symmetrical.

Progressive greying is the result of progressive loss of melanin pigments with each successive moult, owing to the gradual reduction in tyrosinase activity or due to the death of pigment cells with ageing. Progressive greying is generally non-heritable and is triggered by several factors including age, and disorders such as vitiligo, bleaching of feathers, illness, or dietary imbalance. However, in few cases it may be inherited and is considered rare (van Grouw 2013, 2018). In the Rufous-tailed Lark the whitening of feathers was more than 75% when we encountered the bird.

Although progressive greying is most common in birds, reports are insufficient (Mahabal et al. 2016; Trivedi 2016; Patel 2018; Shah et al. 2018), mostly due to misidentification (Mahabal et al. 2016). This is the first record of progressive greying from India for this species. The only other Alaudidae species reported with colour aberration is the Ashy-crowned sparrow lark *Eremopterix griseus* (Mahabal et al. 2016).

We are grateful to Hein van Grouw for his help.

### References

- Ali, S., & Ripley, S. D., 1987. *Handbook of the birds of India and Pakistan together with those of Bangladesh, Nepal, Bhutan and Sri Lanka. Cuckoo-shrikes to babaxes*. 2nd (Hardback) ed. Delhi: (Sponsored by Bombay Natural History Society.) Oxford University Press. Vol. 5 of 10 vols. Pp. i-xvi, 1-278+2+8 ll.
- Grimmett, R., Inskipp, C., & Inskipp, T., 2011. *Birds of the Indian Subcontinent: India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Bhutan, Bangladesh and the Maldives*. 1<sup>st</sup> ed. Bloomsbury Publishing, London, United Kingdom. Pp. 308.
- Kazmierczak, K., 2015. *A field guide to the birds of India, Sri Lanka, Pakistan, Nepal, Bhutan, Bangladesh and the Maldives*. 1st ed. New Delhi: Om Book Service. Pp. 1-352.
- Mahabal, A., van Grouw, H., Sharma, R. M., & Thakur, S., 2016. How common is albinism really? Colour aberrations in Indian birds reviewed. *Dutch Birding* 38: 301-309.
- Patel, J. H., 2018. Sightings of colour aberrant birds in Ankleshwar area. *Flamingo* 16 (2): 15-16.
- Shah, T. K., M., A. S., & Patel, H. J., 2018. A note on progressive greying in Ashy Prinia *Prinia socialis* in Vadodara city, Gujarat, India. *BirdingASIA* 30: 88-89.
- Trivedi, R., 2016. Observations of some colour aberrations in birds seen in Gujarat. *Indian BIRDS* 12 (2&3): 74-75.
- van Grouw, H., 2013. What colour is that bird? The causes and recognition of common colour aberrations in birds. *British Birds* 106 (1): 17-29.
- van Grouw, H., 2018. White feathers in black birds. *British Birds* 111: 250-263.

– Yuyutshu N. Bhattacharya\*, Rajrajeshwar K. Thakar\* & Geeta S. Padate

All: Division of Avian Biology and Wildlife Biology, Department of Zoology, Faculty of Science, The Maharaja Sayajirao University of Baroda, Vadodara, 39002, Gujarat, India. E-mail: [yuyutshu007@gmail.com](mailto:yuyutshu007@gmail.com)

\*The authors have contributed equally.

### The breeding of Great Crested Grebe *Podiceps cristatus* at a second site in Rajasthan, India

The Great Crested Grebe *Podiceps cristatus* is considered a winter visitor to India, with a range from northern India to north-eastern India (Assam and Manipur), southern Rajasthan to western Gujarat, and eastwards to Orissa (Grimmett et al. 2011; Rasmussen & Anderton 2012). It is also known to breed sporadically in Gujarat (Bulkley 1891; Mundkur & Pravez 1986; Himmatsinhji et al. 1992; Chaoji 2010), Andhra Pradesh (Sraavan