

in south-eastern Siberia, eastern China, Korea, and Japan, and winters mainly from the Malay Peninsula to the Greater Sundas, Sulawesi, and Philippines (Martínez-Vilalta et al. 2020). The only reference to this species in regional books is in the *Ripley Guide* (Rasmussen & Anderton 2012) where it is mentioned as possible in the northeastern parts of South Asia.

Schrenck's Bittern is a passage migrant through Hong Kong, the Malay Peninsula, and Thailand while it is a vagrant in Myanmar. There are only two exceptional cases of its vagrancy to Germany (in mid 1890s) and Italy (1912) though only the latter has been accepted as a genuine vagrant (Martínez-Vilalta et al. 2020). The presence of this bird in Sri Lanka during mid-winter, outside its migration period, is truly exceptional as the bird might have spent its entire winter in the reserve.

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## A colour aberrant White-throated Fantail *Rhipidura albicollis* in Jalpaiguri town, West Bengal

On 09 June 2020, 1743 h, while passing through the lanes of the Mashkalaibari area (26.52°N, 88.73°E), a well-wooded suburban region in Jalpaiguri town, West Bengal, I saw a small white bird that came and perched on a short mango *Mangifera indica*, and later on a neem *Melia azedarach* tree that was c.2 m high, in a small plot covered with some trees, creepers, ferns, etc. From its Japanese hand fan-shaped tail, slightly lowered wings, its characteristic behaviour, and unique call, I identified it as a White-throated Fantail *Rhipidura albicollis*; one which had abnormal

colours. On that day I had no camera with me, so I returned the next day to search for the bird and was able to photograph it between 1730 and 1820 h [100]. Residents told me that they were noticing the bird since a few days. On the next day, I saw a bird that had the normal plumage of the species, chasing the colour aberrant one. Though I used to pass by this area every day till 13 June, I did not spot this individual again.



100. Caption.

From the picture it is clear that the bird is completely white in plumage except some black near one eye. Feet and bill are pink. The colour of eyes appear to be dark. Based on the eye colour and the lack of total white colouration, I concluded that this is a case of leucism.

A neighbour informed me about a colour aberrant White-throated Fantail that he observed in the middle of April 2020, in his backyard, near Ananda Chandra College campus, one kilometer from my sighting. He did not keep notes of his observation, except that the bird was often seen around 1100 h. Though I visited that area on 19 and 20 April, I did not see the bird. Based on his video, it appears to be the same individual due to the presence of the black near the eye.

This appears to be the first instance of leucism in this species, from India, as I could not find any such cases in any of the online sites nor is it included in Mahabal et al. (2016) who reviewed this topic for India.

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## Conflict between nesting Shikras *Accipiter badius* and Sri Lanka Grey Hornbills *Ocyrceros gingalensis*

On three occasions in May 2020, I observed a pair of nesting Shikras *Accipiter badius* attack Sri Lanka Grey Hornbills *Ocyrceros gingalensis* in mid-air. The incidents happened on 15th, 20th, and 22nd of the month, and were observed from my elevated balcony overlooking a wooded area in the outskirts of Matara (Southern Province), Sri Lanka. In the first and the last incidents, the Shikra dived at the hornbill from above but the hornbill made evasive maneuvers and escaped. On the 20th, however, the attack resulted in physical contact. The Accipiter lightly struck the

hornbill on its back, from above, as it was flying. Upon contact or slightly prior to that, the hornbill took a steep clumsy descent, with wings flailing, and disappeared into the forest vegetation below. The Shikra ceased pursuit and flew away. It was unclear if the hornbill sustained an injury. The Shikras were nesting on a platform of sticks in a lofty tree near where the incidents happened. All three dives originated at or near the nest.

Shikras are pugnacious hawks known for the fierce defense of their nests (Lamba 1964; Sangha 2003; Naoroji 2006; Ananian et al. 2010). They are known to eat bats and other small vertebrate prey of 'manageable size' (Ali & Ripley 1987; Muni & Hegde 1998; Agoramoorthy & Hsu 2001; Zarri 2001). There is a photographic record of a Shikra pursuing a young Indian Grey Hornbill *O. birostris* (Goel 2020). The endemic Sri Lanka Grey Hornbills are also known to eat small vertebrate prey like lizards (Ali & Ripley 1987; Henry 1971; Wijerathne & Wickramasinghe 2018). So here we have a case of a predator attacking a predator. Theoretically, a Sri Lanka Grey Hornbill can opportunistically prey on a Shikra egg or chick. This made me wonder if the Shikras were offensively pursuing the hornbills as prey, or if they were defensively reacting to a specific previous unpleasant experience with the hornbills.

I did not have to wait long for an answer. On 06 June 2020, my attention was drawn to the nest by prolonged agitated calls of the Shikra. Two Sri Lanka Grey Hornbills were perched by the nest when a parent Shikra was in it, apparently incubating. The hornbills hopped around the nest and took turns attempting to maraud it. The hornbills appeared to be hunting cooperatively, with one apparently trying to distract the Shikra while the other was trying to maraud the nest contents. The Shikra stood its ground and kept shuffling around to face each intruder, hissing defiantly and uttering its 'ki-kiu!' calls. After about five minutes, the hornbills gave up and flew away. Clearly, the attacks by Shikras that I had observed earlier were defensive, rather than offensive, in nature. Given that the hornbills are double (59 cm) the size of a Shikra (30-34 cm) (Ali & Ripley 1987), it is unlikely that Shikras would pursue prey of such large size.

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## Brood parasitism on Red-billed Leiothrix *Leiothrix lutea* in Meghalaya

We report a case of brood parasitism of a Red-billed Leiothrix *Leiothrix lutea*, by an unidentified cuckoo species, observed on 04 July 2020 in Kyrdemkhla (25.45°N, 91.82°E; 1,777 m asl), a village that is 28 km southwards of Shillong, Meghalaya.

The host parent was photographed [101, 102] feeding a cuckoo juvenile, twice, with small caterpillars or worms, on a tree branch. The cuckoo was silent. Only one adult Leiothrix was observed and there were no Leiothrix chicks seen. Based on our birdwatching forays in Meghalaya over the last 15 years, we narrowed the list of probable cuckoo species to three: Common Cuckoo *Cuculus canorus*, Indian Cuckoo *C. micropterus*, and Himalayan Cuckoo *C. saturatus*, as the calls of these birds are frequently heard, though sightings are rare. The juveniles of these three species look similar to each other, and we could not make a conclusive identification.



101. Foster parent Red-billed Leiothrix feeding a cuckoo juvenile



102. Back view of the same cuckoo juvenile