

A colour-aberrant Black winged Stilt *Himantopus himantopus* from Bilaspur, Chhattisgarh

Birds use plumage coloration for concealment, mate selection, and social communication, with colour aberrations like leucism resulting from genetic mutations affecting melanin distribution. Avian color aberrations are often misidentified, with 'albino' incorrectly applied to various conditions. A standardized classification now recognizes six heritable pigment mutations: albinism, leucism, brown, dilution, ino, and melanism (van Grouw 2021). Here, we report a Black-winged Stilt *Himantopus himantopus* with 'brown' mutation, contributing to the growing documentation of avian color aberrations.

On 30 March 2025, at around 0900 h, during routine birdwatching at NTPC Seepat Dam (22.094°N, 82.289°E), Bilaspur, Chhattisgarh, India, we observed a flock of c.200 Black-winged Stilts. The stilts are well-known to demonstrate a variety of plumages (Parasharya et al. 2010; Rasmussen & Anderton 2012), particularly on its head, and we started documented these plumages in this particular flock. During this documentation, an individual exhibiting a highly unusual plumage was photographed [151, 152]. It appeared very pale cream with hardly any black on wings. However, despite its plumage, the bird showed typical morphological features of a Black-winged Stilt, including a slender body, long reddish legs, and a straight long dark-brown bill confirming the bird to belong to the same species. It also associated freely with the rest of the flock.



Rahul Gupta

151. A colour-aberrant Black-winged Stilt along with normal plumaged ones.



Himanshu Gupta

152. Cream-coloured Black-winged Stilt showing normal-coloured bill, legs and iris indicating 'brown' mutation.

The possibility of this colour aberration being of albinism was dismissed, as the bird's plumage was not entirely white. The bird cannot be classified as leucistic, as the pupil color was dark red, which is the expected eye-colour for this species. Progressive greying and dilution were also ruled out as the colour is not pure white and also some melanin is present in the feathers (van Grouw 2021). The most appropriate explanation for this plumage variation is the 'brown' mutation, as the typically black areas of the plumage appear cream-coloured or light brown. The bird also exhibited normal-coloured iris, legs, and bill. Additionally, the faded appearance of its feathers suggest that they may have been bleached by prolonged exposure to sunlight. The pattern and distribution of the plumage—particularly across the wings, neck, and nape—are consistent with a male Black-winged Stilt in non-breeding plumage exhibiting 'brown' mutation.

Mahabal et al. (2016) reviewed 180 instances of colour aberrations in Indian birds, but did not include any colour aberration for Black-winged Stilts. Since then, several reports of colour-aberrant birds have been published from India and other parts of South Asia, but we are not aware of any instance of colour aberrations occurring in Black-winged Stilts. In fact, we could not find any colour aberrations, from India, being reported for the family Recurvirostridae, which encompasses avocets and stilts.

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- **Himanshu Gupta, Rahul Gupta, Pratik Thakur & Ratnesh Gupta**
Himanshu Gupta, Government Hospital, Surguja 497001, Chhattisgarh, India. E-mail: shmm10@gmail.com [HG]
Rahul Gupta, Paramount Green Energies, Karona chowk, Sadarbar, Bilaspur 495001, Chhattisgarh, India. E-mail: rahulhobbyist00861@gmail.com [RG]
Pratik Thakur, Prakriti Shodh Evam Sanrakshan Welfare Society, Dongargarh, Rajnandgaon District 491445, Chhattisgarh, India. E-mail: pratik5959@gmail.com [PT] [Corresponding author]
Ratnesh Gupta, VM trading company, in front of Madhu Mishra house, Vinobha Nagar, Bilaspur 495001, Chhattisgarh, India. E-mail: rglink.1@gmail.com [RG]

A Long-billed Plover *Thinornis placidus* from Buhchangphai, Mizoram

On 11 January 2025, while on a birding visit to Buhchangphai (24.330°N, 92.654°E; 61 m asl), c.22 km north of Kolasib town, in northern Mizoram, northeast India, one of the team members, TH, noticed a small bird standing in the drying mud of a drained fishpond. At first glance, we presumed it to be a lone Little Ringed Plover *Thinornis dubius*, which we have observed visiting during the winter months from February 2022 till January 2025 (pers. obsv.). We continued our observations of this lone bird till 15 January 2025 and took several photographs to document it. On subsequent visits, we found up to four Little Ringed Plovers in the same area and were thus afforded the opportunity to compare the two birds in post-harvest paddy stubble and drying fishponds.