

A colour-aberrant Ashy-throated Warbler *Phylloscopus maculipennis* from Uttarakhand, India

On 16 November 2021, at approximately 1600 hours. I was birding in the vicinity of Ranikhet Cantonment, Uttarakhand, India (29.639°N, 79.454°E; c.1900m asl) when I observed a warbler foraging among the leaves of a Banj oak *Quercus leucotrichophora* tree. From my previous experience with leaf warblers of the region, I identified the bird to be an Ashy-throated Warbler *Phylloscopus maculipennis* based on its size, structure, behaviour, and plumage pattern. However, the bird was unique in having very limited pigmentation on its head and throat and near-absence of plumage markings on its head, while its iris and bill were dark. At that time, I thought it was partially leucistic. The bird seemed to have a symmetrical lack of pigment on head and throat feathers as well as a brighter yellow on the mantle and chest feathers as against what is normally observed in the species [182–185]. On returning from Ranikhet at the time, I misplaced the memory card on which the images of the bird were taken and I forgot about this incident till recently, when I found the memory card and saw the images of the warbler again.

Unusual plumaged birds that are not entirely white or entirely black are often casually labelled as leucistic or partially leucistic. However, there are many more colour aberrations than these popular terms (van Grouw 2021). A detailed examination of these photographs suggests that my bird was exhibiting a form of colour aberration known as “progressive greying” (van Grouw 2021). Importantly, dark iris and normal coloured bill and legs argue against several other forms of colour aberrations.



182. Ashy-throated Warbler showing a mostly white hood pointing to lack of melanin.



183. The yellow parts of its plumage appear more yellow due to lack of melanin



184. Presence of two wing bars on green flight feathers consistent with Ashy-throated Warbler



185. Normal coloured bill and legs eliminate other forms of colour aberration.

In case of the present bird, it can be observed that the head, throat, mantle and much of the underparts lack melanin – thus causing whitening of what are supposed to be grey or black parts, and at the same time resulting in brighter yellow colouration of the green and yellow parts. Carotenoid pigments are unaffected by progressive greying. Consequently, feathers that are normally green appear brighter yellow because the melanin component responsible for the green coloration is reduced or absent.

Similar patterns of progressive greying affecting only the head and body while sparing the wings and tail have been reported in heritable forms of the condition (van Grouw 2021). In the heritable forms, the loss of melanin often starts immediately in the post-juvenile moult when all body feathers get replaced. It may be noted that the post-juvenile moult in passerines is symmetrical and the feathers of the wings and tail are not moulted in the first year (Ginn & Melville 1983; Jenni & Winkler 2020). The wing feathers and tail feathers, however, do not regrow in the first post-juvenile moult, so they still are fully melanised, as in this bird. If the bird survives to undergo its first complete adult moult, the wing and tail feathers may also lose melanin, producing whitening in those feathers as well.

Among *Phylloscopus*, there has been isolated cases of colour aberration reported as “leucism” from India in social media; including a Greenish Warbler *P. trochiloides* from Kotagiri, Tamil Nadu (Rathor 2023) and a Lemon-rumped Warbler *P. chloronotus* from New Tehri, Uttarakhand (Gupta 2023) – both in February 2023. Similarly, colour aberrant Willow Warbler *P. trochilus* has been reported from Scotland (Alibone 2011). However, all these

cases are likely to be instances of progressive greying and their evidence has not been strictly reviewed here.

The above observations, in correlation with the fact that leucism is rare in nature (van Grouw 2021), are most consistent with progressive greying, possibly of a heritable form, in which body feathers lost melanin during the post-juvenile moult.

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The Collared Kingfisher *Todiramphus chloris*: An addition to the avifauna of Mizoram

The Collared Kingfisher *Todiramphus chloris* is a medium-sized kingfisher, with a large dark-coloured bill, bright turquoise-blue head, back, wings, and tail; a distinctive broad white collar that extends ventrally to the underside; and a black mask with white supercilium. Subtle differences exist between the subspecies – usually with upperparts varying from blue to green to olive-toned, underparts sometimes buffier, and white loreal spot that

sometimes extends as a supercilium (Woodall 2020). It is a widespread species in Southeast Asia and a common resident in the mangrove swamps of Sundarbans and Bhitarkanika on the eastern coast of India (Ali 2002; Grimmett et al. 2013; Grewal et al. 2016; Majumdar et al. 2022; eBird 2025; Praveen 2025). It has frequently been documented as a vagrant, with stray records from Japan, Brazil, and the Christmas Island (Lees & Gilroy 2022).

On 17 August 2025, while birding in Buhchangphai (24.335°N, 92.657°E; c.68 m asl), a small town 22 km north of Kolasib, in northern Mizoram, India, CL noticed a blue-coloured bird perched on electric lines above paddy fields. Though facing the setting sun, CL managed to take discernible photographs of the unfamiliar kingfisher [186]. We identified it as a Collared Kingfisher by referring to descriptions and illustrations in standard field guides. The color of the wings and back are not visible in the photo but the faded scalloping in the front, and the yellow at the base of the lower mandible suggests that the photographed individual is immature (Grimmett et al. 2013; Grewal et al. 2016; Woodall 2020).

We found no mention of this species in Mizoram in discussions with experienced birders and in searching social media and published literature (Zonunmawia & Pradhan 2004; Choudhury 2008; Lalthanzara & Kasambe 2015; Lawlor & Lalthanzara 2021; Lawlor et al. 2023; Sawmliana 2024). We therefore conclude that this is the first confirmed sighting from the state of Mizoram. Since there is no vernacular name in the Mizo language, we propose to name it as *Kaikuangrâl-hnung-pawl*, meaning a kingfisher with a blue back.

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186. Collared Kingfisher from Buhchangphai, Kolasib District, Mizoram.