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Report of an abnormal morph of Black-headed Ibis *Threskiornis melanocephalus* (Latham, 1790)

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ABSTRACT

The Black-headed Ibis (BHI) *Threskiornis melanocephalus* is a medium sized (65-75 cm long) wading, nomadic Ciconiiform waterbird, gregariously frequenting shallow habitats. In this communication, we report a rare instance of an leucistic subadult BHI. Legs and bill was black, but head and the upper part of the throat white; nape was pure white, but some area around eyes and front of neck was seen greyish.

Key words: Black-headed Ibis, waterbird, leucistic, subadult.

The Black-headed Ibis *Threskiornis melanocephalus* is a medium sized (65-75 cm long) wading, nomadic Ciconiiform waterbird, gregariously frequenting shallow habitats. It is a wide ranging species distributed across Asian continent from India and Sri Lanka, north and east to Nepal, Myanmar, Thailand and China northeast to Heilongjiang, south to Nam Phan in Vietnam and southern Cambodia, through the Malay Peninsula in Malaysia to Java and probably Sumatra in Indonesia (Hancock et al. 2001).

In this communication, we report a rare instance of an leucistic Black-headed Ibis. On September 15, 2016, we visited a breeding heronry in Bhilwara city, Rajasthan, situated on the islet in Nehru Talai wetland (25°21.432'N, 74°38.390'E). The leucistic bird was perched on *Prosopis juliflora*. Legs and bill was black, but head and the upper part of the throat white; nape was pure white, but some area around eyes and front of neck was seen greyish. The bird was a subadult and probably more than 40 days old. In adult, head and upper part of the throat was found pure black, while nestlings show white downs on the entire body, but head and neck found covered with black downs

(Ali and Ripley 2007; Beckmann et al. 2015). During normal course of development, bill and legs in fledging after 40 days turned into black, whereas head and hind neck covered with greyish feathers and throat with white feathers (Del Hoyo et al. 1992). According to Ali and Ripley (2007), in newly fledged juvenile, head and hind neck covers with black or slaty down while front of neck covered with short white disintegrated feathers.

Color abnormality is a common phenomenon in birds (Van Grouw 2006, Davis 2007). Among Ibis group; Razafimanjato et al. (2012) reported partial albinism in left wing primaries, several secondaries and underwing coverts of Glossy Ibis *Plegadis falcinellus*, while aberrations in the pigmentation also reported in Scarlet Ibis *Eudocimus ruber* (Van Grouw 2006). Aberrations in pigmentation in birds are mostly caused by food problem or may be sometime by sunlight (Van Grouw 2006).

Above discussion reveals that the bird sighted probably a first case of abnormal morph or aberrant form in *T. melanocephalus*.



Fig. 1. An abnormal morph of Black-headed Ibis *Threskiornis melanocephalus* (a, b).

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