

DOI: 10.1515/isspar-2018-0003

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FIRST RECORD OF A MELANISTIC HOUSE SPARROW *PASSER DOMESTICUS* IN INDIA

Melanism is a colour variation referring to the excessive deposition of the pigment melanin, resulting in feathers darker than normal. Two classes of melanin are distinguished: eumelanins are responsible for black feathers while phaeomelanins are responsible for a range of brown feathers (Jawor and Breitwisch 2003, McGraw 2006).

On 20th July 2018 we recorded a flock of 22 House Sparrows feeding on rice on the floor in Udhagamandalam, The Nilgiris, Tamil Nadu, India. One of the birds had a completely black plumage and legs while the beak was normally coloured (Fig. 1).



Fig. 1. A Melanistic House Sparrow in Udhagamandalam, The Nigiris, Tamil Nadu, India

This melanistic individual was very aggressive to the other House Sparrows while feeding the grains. Legendre (1941) and Van Grouw (2012) observed that melanistic individuals are more resistant to stress, more aggressive and differ in their metabolism than normal-coloured individuals.

Melanistic House Sparrows are previously reported in Netherlands, France, Poland and North America (Gros 1965, van Grouw 2012). In India a lot of observations are made to identify melanistic as well as albinistic individuals in many bird species (Mahabal 2015, Trivedi 2016, Van Grouw 2016). The record described here is the first on melanism found in House Sparrows in India.

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