

10. ALBINISM IN WHITE-BREASTED KINGFISHER *HALCYON SMYRNENSIS* (LINNÉ) FROM INDIA

On August 7, 1999, my attention was drawn towards a white bird that flew past our speeding jeep between Sambajiguda and Jamini villages in Jainur mandal, Adilabad district of Andhra Pradesh, north of Kawal Wildlife Sanctuary (19° 05'-19° 20' N and 78° 32'-79° 12' E). A thorough search of the area resulted in the sighting of an albino White-breasted Kingfisher *Halcyon smyrnensis* (Linné) that was observed from 1218 to 1226 hrs. It was frequently chasing another individual of the same species with loud cackling calls. The birds remained in the vicinity of a small stream flowing between fallow fields and scrub. Alarmed at being followed constantly, the birds flew towards a nearby hillock where they could not be located. Photographs taken are not of printable quality, but fortunately the bird was successfully videographed.

Albinism among avians is not an uncommon feature and has been reported for many species earlier (Pittie, A. pers. comm.). Albinism in White-breasted Kingfisher has been reported from Sri Lanka (Gunawardana 1993)

and Keoladeo National Park, Bharatpur (Rahmani, A.R. pers. comm.). This is the second report of the same from India.

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11. DUETTING CALLS OF THE HEART-SPOTTED WOODPECKERS *HEMICIRCUS CANENTE* (LESSON)

The various calls of the Heart-spotted Woodpecker (*Hemicircus canente*) have been summarized by Short (1982), and Ali and Ripley (1983). In both these standard references, there is no mention of a duetting call-note, which I have heard frequently during my study of woodpeckers at the Peechi-Vazhani Wildlife Sanctuary in Kerala. Both these works mention a "twee twee twee" call-note (originally described by Betts 1934), which is sometimes "extended into a trill of seven or eight notes." Short (1982) has interpreted this call as being equivalent to the aggressive trill call of the related Gray and Buff Woodpecker (*H. concretus*), which is found in Southeast Asia. This call of *H. concretus* contains a series of fast-repeated "pit" call-notes. He also commented that the "twee twee twee" call-note is similar to the thin, plaintive "su-sie", a call given with a short bow, repeated up to 10-12 times.

I would describe the "twee twee twee" notes referred to by Betts as the "duetting" notes and these are quite different from the "su-sie" call-notes. During my study at Peechi (1991-1993), I have recorded the

duetting calls on at least 32 different dates. These calls are a fast repeated series of "twee twee twee", quite loud and sharp, and audible at fairly considerable distances from the birds (c. 200-250 m). These duets go on for anything between 5-6 seconds to about a minute, non-stop. Often, both birds of the pair are present next to one another or are within a few metres of each other when the calls are uttered. Most often, the calls are given from a perch, but they are also occasionally heard when one of the birds flies to join its mate from a nearby tree or branch. I have seen duetting birds often sitting next to one another. The birds assume an upright posture with their wings slightly drooped and often face each other while calling.

Duetting calls were heard mostly between September and December (59%), and rarely after February (13%). I have heard the birds duet near their nests. On one occasion, a male which came to relieve its incubating mate, called from a nearby tree. The female promptly responded by flying out of the nest-hole, and they duetted for 5-6 seconds. After this, the

male entered the nest-hole and the female flew away.

In contrast, the "su-sie" calls are uttered even when the birds are alone and they are accompanied by bows and cocking the head. Though several such calls are repeated, this is done slowly, one at a time with an interval of one or two seconds each.

In my opinion, the duetting calls of the heart-spotted woodpecker could serve two purposes: the first, as a recognition call, perhaps also to maintain the pair bond, and second, being loud and sharp, as a territorial call. This species, as well as the related Gray and Buff Woodpecker, are known to drum uncommonly (Short 1982). I too heard the Heart-spotted Woodpecker drumming only on two occasions in the entire study period of 18 months. The drumming was weak and rather

inaudible. The duet calls may act as a substitute for the drumming and may serve to announce the occupation of a territory.

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12. WOODPECKER HOLES USED FOR NESTING BY SECONDARY CAVITY-NESTERS IN THE WESTERN GHATS, INDIA

The use of woodpecker holes by secondary cavity-nesting birds is well known (Short 1979). Yet no specific information exists for the Western Ghats, India. During a study of woodpeckers at the Peechi-Vazhani Wildlife Sanctuary, Kerala, I came across eight species of secondary cavity-nesting birds using old holes of five woodpecker species (Table 1).

There was a close relation between the size (weight) of the bird and the diameter of the nest hole entrance. All the birds weighing more than 100 gm

nested in the nest-holes of the Greater Golden-backed Woodpecker, whose mean nest-hole diameter was 12.7 cm, while the smallest bird (Yellow-throated Sparrow) nested more frequently in the nest-cavities of the Brown-capped Pygmy Woodpecker. This choice may be related to competition. Birds nesting in large cavities stand a greater chance of eviction by a larger competitor.

In addition, bees were seen occupying two nests of the Greater Golden-backed Woodpecker and one of the Lesser Golden-backed Woodpecker. Yellow-throated

Table 1: Details of secondary cavity-nesters occupying woodpecker nests

Secondary cavity-nesters	Woodpecker species				
	MG (12.7)* n = 19	SB (7.4)* n = 6	YN (6.8)* n = 3	MA (4.7)* n = 9	PY (3.4)* n = 10
Indian Roller (<i>Coracias benghalensis</i>) (169 gm)**	2	-	-	-	-
Spotted Owlet (<i>Athene brama</i>) (114 gm)**	1	-	-	-	-
Common Myna (<i>Acridotheres tristis</i>) (110 gm)**	3	-	-	-	-
Rose-ringed Parakeet (<i>Psittacula krameri</i>) (104 gm)**	1	-	-	-	-
Jungle Myna (<i>Acridotheres fuscus</i>) (83 gm)**	-	1	-	-	-
Grey-headed Starling (<i>Sturnus malabaricus</i>) (40 gm)**	-	-	1	-	-
Oriental Magpie Robin (<i>Copsychus saularis</i>) (35 gm)**	-	1	-	-	-
Yellow-throated Sparrow (<i>Petronia xanthocollis</i>) (18 gm)**	-	-	-	1	4

MG = *Chrysocolaptes lucidus* (Greater Golden-backed Woodpecker), SB = *Picus xanthopygaeus* (Little Scaly-bellied Green Woodpecker), YN = *Picus chlorolophus* (Small Yellow-naped Woodpecker), MA = *Dendrocopos maharattensis* (Yellow-fronted Pied Woodpecker), PY = *Dendrocopos nanus* (Brown-capped Pygmy Woodpecker), *Nest entrance diameter estimate in cm (Santharam 1995), **Body-weight of the bird (Ali and Ripley 1983).



Santharam, V. 2004. "Duetting Calls of the Heart spotted Woodpeckers *Hemicircus Canente* (Lesson)." *The journal of the Bombay Natural History Society* 101, 157–158.

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