

PHOTOGRAPHIC EVIDENCE OF PUTATIVE INO FORM OF TWO HOUSE SPARROWS *PASSER DOMESTICUS* IN INDIA

DEEPAK KUMAR

Asst. Professor, Laxman Singh Mahar Campus Pithoragarh, SSJ University, Uttarakhand, India 262501,

Corresponding author: deepakapphysics@gmail.com

Reviewer: Hein van Grouw

INTRODUCTION

Five species of sparrows are found on the Indian Subcontinent. These are, House Sparrow *Passer domesticus*, Spanish Sparrow *P. hispaniolensis*, Sind Sparrow *P. pyrrhonotus*, Russet Sparrow *P. cinnamomeus* and Eurasian Tree Sparrow *P. montanus* (Abhinav, 2020). One of the commonest birds is the house sparrow *P. domesticus*. The house sparrow is usually seen to co-exist with humans, nesting close to human habitation, as the species depends on humans for food. In Himalayan villages, these sparrows are still common although in certain parts of India, populations have declined by up to 70% (Dandapat *et al.*, 2010).

Two house sparrows with very pale plumage were observed in Uttarakhand, India.

OBSERVATION

There are many, many reports in the literature of sightings of aberrant coloured birds, but the identification of the aberration involved is often incorrect (Van Grouw *et al.* 2016). Two nearly white house sparrows *P. domesticus* were

sighted, of which one was photographed at Narayan Nagar (Didihat) (29°46'21'' N and 80°17'21'' E), a small town near Ogl, on National Highway 9 (Pithoragarh to Dharchula) in Pithoragarh district of Uttarakhand, India at an altitude of 1689 m.

The unusual house sparrows were noticed at by the author with his colleagues, Rohit Pandey and Dayadhar Semwal when the birds were actively foraging for food on the ground. Also, a video of both individuals was recorded on 27th May 2023 at 03:30 pm with a mirrorless Nikon Z50 camera equipped with 50-250mm lens.

Based on the remaining pale melanin pigment in their plumage, the aberration causing the aberrantly coloured plumage is most likely to be a form of Ino (van Grouw *et. al.* 2016)

It was clearly seen that the two aberrant coloured house sparrows were searching and getting the insects or food from the soil together with other normal sparrows and a male house sparrow was feeding one of them. Based on the structure of the plumage, it would appear that these two

birds were still juvenile, and that may be why the normal male (presumably the father) was still feeding them occasionally. (Video can be viewed at the YouTube link of my channel- <https://youtu.be/rOMZ41FXATM>). The aberrant coloured house sparrows were fully accepted by their normal coloured counterparts.

This behaviour is truly different as compared in the case of an aberrant coloured (mutation Brown) Himalayan Bulbul recorded by Singh *et al.*, 2020 (recorded incorrectly as partial albinistic by the authors). In that case the pale Himalayan Bulbul was harassed by other normal coloured Bulbuls, although the presumably normal coloured partner had fully accepted it. But in the present finding both, normal sparrows and pale sparrows were interacting amicably with each other. On 28th May 2023 again, the whole flock was seen interacting harmoniously.

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Figure 1: A partially albino sparrow alone



Figure 2: A partially albino sparrow with other normal sparrows



Figure 3: Narayan Nagar (Pithoragarh), Courtesy: Google Earth