

SHORT NOTE

DOI: 10.59443/ISSpar-2023-0003

Rushikesh Sankpal

Department of Environmental Science, Savitribai Phule Pune University, Pune, Maharashtra, India PIN 411007
E-mail: rushisankpal@gmail.com

**WHAT TYPE OF HOUSE SPARROW (*PASSER DOMESTICUS*)
PLUMAGE IS THIS? COLOUR ABERRANT OR NORMAL –
A CASE REPORT**

The plumage is a distinctive colouration of a species that serves essential roles in bird communications (Hill and McGraw 2006). Birds with aberrations in plumage colourations have been reported and their types and causes were explained by many (Harrison 1963; McCormac 2001; Guay et al. 2012; Zbyryt et al. 2021). Colour aberrations concerning House Sparrows [*Passer domesticus* (Linnaeus, 1758)] have been described precisely (van Grouw 2012). Such records provide us with information on spatial distribution and frequency.

On June 16th, 2019, I was observing House Sparrows at Kolvihire, Purandar Taluka, Pune District, Maharashtra, India (18°16'02.7"N 74°12'15.6"E). During my observation, I spotted a male House Sparrow with noticeable white portions on the tip of the upper greater coverts on both sides (Figure 1). At first glance, it appeared like a second white wing-bar otherwise observed in Tree Sparrows (*Passer montanus*) (Long 1964). Since the literature describes the presence of a conspicuous white shoulder patch (Ali and Ripley 2001), also referred to as a wing-bar (Long 1964; Anderson 2006) only on the upper middle (median) coverts of House Sparrows (Lowther and Cink 2020); and nobody described the upper greater coverts tipped with white portions or a second wing bar. Also, such a partial lack of melanins in the feathers can be seen in the case of disturbed melanin synthesis as a result of either tyrosine-deficient nutrition or the inefficiency of a bird in extracting tyrosine (van Grouw 2013). So, the question arises: What type of House Sparrow plumage is this? Further studies are required to fill in the missing description and confirm whether such white portions on the tip of the upper greater coverts are considered as a colour aberration or a normal plumage.

Additionally, I observed a white uppertail covert indicating colour aberration (Figure 1). The eyes, feet, and bill were normally coloured, though the bill was not dark black. The white plumage, complete or partial, can be a result of leucism, partial leucism, Progressive Greying, or dietary deficiency. Due to uncertainty, I did not attempt to name the aberration, to avoid misinterpretation of the record (van Grouw et al 2016).



Figure 1: Photographs of the male House Sparrow with noticeable white portions on the tip of the upper greater coverts on both sides (A, B) and a white uppertail covert (©Rushikesh Sankpal)

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I extend my sincere gratitude to the Ela Foundation, Pune for their invaluable support, and to Adam Zbyryt for reviewing the manuscript and providing insightful feedback.

REFERENCES

- Ali S., Ripley S.D. 2001 – Handbook of the Birds of India and Pakistan: Together with Those of Bangladesh, Nepal, Sikkim, Bhutan and Sri Lanka. Vol. 10, Flowerpeckers to Buntings: Synopsis Nos. 1892-2060, Colour Plates 99-106. Second Edition. Oxford University Press; Oxford India Paperbacks. PP 66.
- Anderson T.R. 2006 – Biology of the ubiquitous house sparrow: from genes to populations. Oxford University Press; Aug 10. PP 202-203.
- Guay P.J., Potvin D.A., Robinson R.W. 2012 – Aberrations in plumage coloration in birds. Australian Field Ornithology 29(1): 23-30.
- Harrison C.J.O. 1963 – Grey and fawn variant plumages, Bird Study 10, 4: 219-233, DOI: 10.1080/00063656309476053.
- Hill G.E., McGraw K.J. 2006 – editors. Bird Coloration Volume 2 Function and Evolution. Harvard University Press.
- Long J.L. 1964 – “The sparrow,” Journal of the Department of Agriculture, Western Australia, Series 4: Vol. 5: No. 6, Article 7. Available at: https://library.dpir.wa.gov.au/journal_agriculture4/vol5/iss6/7.
- Lowther P.E., Cink C.L. 2020 – Plumages, Molts, and Structure – In: House Sparrow (*Passer domesticus*), version 1.0. – In Birds of the World (S.M. Billerman, Editor). Cornell Lab of Ornithology, Ithaca, NY, USA. <https://doi.org/10.2173/bow.houspa.01>.
- McCormac J. 2001 – Albinism in birds. The Ohio Cardinal 25(1): 36-9.
- van Grouw H. 2012 – What colour is that sparrow? A case study: colour aberrations in the House Sparrow *Passer domesticus* – Intern. Stud. Sparrows 36: 30-55.
- van Grouw H. 2013 – What Color is that bird? The causes and recognition of common color aberrations in birds. British Birds 106(1-56): 17-29.
- van Grouw H., Mahabal A., Sharma R.M., Thakur S. 2016 – How common is albinism really? Colour aberrations in Indian birds reviewed., Dutch Birding 38: 301-309.
- Zbyryt A., Mikula P., Ciach M., Morelli F., Tryjanowski P. 2021 – A large-scale survey of bird plumage colour aberrations reveals a collection bias in Internet-mined photographs. Ibis 163(2): 566-78.