

NOTES

Two records of albinism in Malagasy birds

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Résumé

Un individu d'*Otus rutilus* atteint d'un albinisme entier a été rencontré dans la forêt de Tsimembo à 10 m de la rive du lac et à 4 m de la lisière de la forêt, à 11 km environ à l'est du village de Masoarivo, Province de Mahajanga et un *Plegadis falcinellus* présentant un albinisme partiel, a été localisé dans une mare non permanente à 2 km au sud du village de Tambohorano, Province de Mahajanga. La mutation affecte le plumage entier chez l'*O. rutilus*, tandis que celle de la couleur du plumage chez le *P. falcinellus* se manifeste au niveau de l'aile gauche, principalement des rémiges primaires et de quelques rémiges secondaires, ainsi que les couvertures sous-alaires. Ces derniers sont complètement blancs au lieu de vert métallique sombre à reflets violets. C'est la première information publiée de ce phénomène pour ces deux espèces à Madagascar.

Introduction

The Malagasy Scops-Owl (*Otus rutilus*) is the smallest nocturnal bird of prey of Madagascar, characterized by coloration varying from gray to rufus, earlike tufts, and yellow eyes (Langrand, 1990). The sexes have similar plumage coloration, which varies between individuals (Langrand, 1990; Morris & Hawkins, 1998). The Glossy Ibis (*Plegadis falcinellus*) is a relatively small, dark, wetland ibis. Sexes are monomorphic and plumage varies slightly with season and age (Langrand, 1990; Morris & Hawkins, 1998). This ibis has a broad worldwide distribution, and in Madagascar it is represented by the nominate subspecies *P. f. falcinellus*, being widespread and fairly common in the west (Langrand, 1990; Morris & Hawkins, 1998).

A study of the breeding biology of *O. rutilus* was conducted in the dry deciduous forest of Tsimembo

(19°01'14.08"S, 44°26'43.26"E) between August 2003 and February 2005, during two different breeding seasons (Ramamonjisoa, 2007). Within the study area, the survey recorded a total of 30 birds of this species, of which one individual was completely in white plumage, including its beak and claws; the iris was red in coloration. During day observations, this individual could be approached within 1 m of the observer and frequently seen when other focal individuals were checked in their roosting sites. Its calls were sometimes heard at night, generally typical of this species, but perhaps slightly more hoarse. The nest of the white plumage bird was not located.

In June 2008, during a reconnaissance visit for an aquatic bird survey, we observed a small group of waterbirds foraging in a shallow temporary pond (17°30'29.56"S, 43°58'11.91"E) about 20 m from the main road and approximately 2 km from Tambohorano village. We counted 15 *P. falcinellus* in this group along with several other aquatic birds. One Glossy Ibis detached from the group and began foraging alone and we noticed a white patch on its left wing. In flight, the white wing feathers of the bird in question appeared clear against the sky with the extent of the partial white coloration comprising all primary remiges, a few secondary, and underwing coverts of the left wing (Figure 1); this is in contrast to the typical dark metallic green and glossy purple (Morris & Hawkins, 1998). The white patch was not obvious when this ibis was walking and foraging, with the wing closed. This partial albino ibis was relocated with a larger flock of conspecifics and assorted waders the following month at the same site.

By definition, an albino bird lacks pigmentation in its feathers on some portion of its body, which are basically white. This depigmentation can be either genetically-based or spontaneous - developing from some physiological factor such as injury, disease, dietary deficiency, and circulatory problems during feather development (Terres, 1980). Four degrees of albinism have been described: partial albinism, imperfect albinism, incomplete, and complete or total albinism (Terres, 1980). Abnormal white feathers are not always due to albinism, and aging may also turn



Figure 1. Glossy Ibis showing partial albinism in left wing primaries, several secondaries and underwing coverts). (Photo by Rene de Roland/The Peregrine Fund.)

a birds' feather white (Terres, 1980). Our observation of the ibis at the Tambohorano wetlands is a classic case of partial albinism and is the first record of this condition for this species in Madagascar.

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