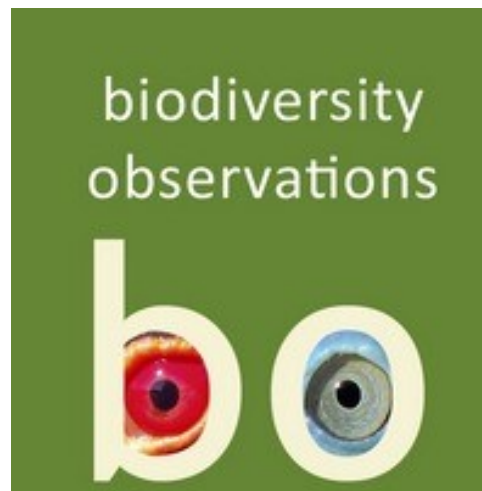


Partial leucistic Gabar Goshawk *Micronisus gabar* in Bethlehem, Free State

Martin Potgieter



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Ornithology

Partial leucistic Gabar Goshawk *Micronisus gabar* in Bethlehem, Free State

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Abstract

A partially leucistic Gabar Goshawk *Micronisus gabar* was photographed in a residential garden in Bethlehem, Free State, on 27 March 2023.

Observation

On 27 March 2023 my wife, Melanie, was alerted to the presence of a predator in the garden by the alarm calls of the resident garden birds. On investigating, she found a Gabar Goshawk *Micronisus gabar* perched in one of our Sweet Thorn *Vachellia karroo* trees. She called me to come and have a look since the bird seemed to be oddly coloured. Because of the dappled sunlight, the extent of the bird's odd colouration was not immediately apparent. I managed to get closer to the tree in order to gain an unobscured view of the bird and take a couple of photographs (Figures 1 & 2).

The bird's head was slate grey, consistent with the normal colouration of the pale morph (Allan 2005). However, the upper wing coverts were a mix of pure white feathers, interspersed with normal coloured slate grey feathers. One visible greater covert feather showed some white barring on the grey of the inner web.

The flight feathers seemed to be the normal colouration with the primaries being blackish brown above with pale barring on the inner webs. This bird's throat was grey, but had a few very small white flecks. The upper breast, which in the normal pale morph should be unmarked grey (Allan 2005), was pure white. Unfortunately, I could not get clear views of the lower breast or belly (I flushed the bird when I tried to change my position), which should be white with fine grey barring. However, from what I could see it also appeared to be uniformly white; i.e. the bird seemed to be pure white from the upper breast to its vent.

The bill was dark grey, with the cere and legs red and the eyes a dark red brown colour, all of which is consistent with the normal colouration of the pale morph of this species (Allan 2005).

Discussion

When approached for comments, Dr Phil Whittington, Ornithologist, East London Museum, mentioned that there are only a few reports of leucistic or albinistic birds of this species. He went through some of the literature and indicated that Peter Steyn mentions a record of a partially albinistic bird in Kruger National Park but gives no further details (Steyn 1982). Roberts VII (Allan 2005) states that there is one record of total albinism and another of a leucistic juvenile female. The description for this juvenile leucistic female is given as follows: "*The bird was basically white. The normal immature markings (vertical striping and horizontal barring of the breast, barring of the wings and tail) were just evident as a pale brown colour. The bill and claws were black, but the eye was pale yellow instead of the normal dark brown, and the cere and legs were pale orange instead of the normal orange red*" (Kemp & Snelling 1973).



Figure 1: Partially leucistic Gabar Goshawk – Bethlehem, Free State, 27 March 2023.



Figure 2: Partially leucistic Gabar Goshawk – Bethlehem, Free State, 27 March 2023.

Intermediate stages between the pale and dark morphs do occur (Allan 2005). This species is well known for its melanistic morph, with 6.5% to 25% of the population in different areas, being melanistic. Apparently the melanistic or dark morphs are commonest in areas with high rainfall (Kemp & Kirwan 2020).

On 28 July 2019 an unusual pied form of a Gabar Goshawk *Micronisus gabar* was observed in Harare, Zimbabwe. The plumage showed a combination of leucism and melanism, described as follows; “*the head and neck were mainly black with some partially white feathers. The mantle was largely white and the rest of the upperparts a mix of black and white. The upper tail was similar to a normally plumaged pale morph, the underwing coverts black and white and the flight feathers mainly white with black barring*” (Riddle 2020).

Acknowledgments

My thanks to Dr Phil Whittington for commenting on this note.

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