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An electronic journal published by the Animal Demography Unit at the University of Cape Town

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Julio de Castro and Mabel de Castro

Recommended citation format:

de Castro J, de Castro M 2016. Leucistic Cape Glossy Starling, *Lamprotornis nitens*. Biodiversity Observations, Vol 7.74: 1-3

URL: <http://bo.adu.org.za/content.php?id=267>

Published online: 10 October 2016

AVIAN PLUMAGE

LEUCISTIC CAPE GLOSSY STARLING, *LAMPROTORNIS NITENS*

Julio de Castro and Mabel de Castro*

34 Hedsor Drive, Harare, Zimbabwe

*Corresponding author: juliojdecastro@gmail.com

Introduction

Animal coloration can deviate from the standard, from complete melanism to albinism. There are also intermediate forms and leucism (leukism) is one of them. Leucism is defined as a phenotype resulting from blemishes in pigment cell differentiation during development with the consequence that the entire animal or patches of its body being white as they lack the cells capable of making pigment (Sibley, 2011).

Leucism causing animals to appear "blotchy" is the most common observation. A number of bird species have been seen showing various degrees of leucism in the UK and elsewhere (British Trust for Ornithology, no date) including Blackbird (*Turdus merula*), Jackdaw (*Corvus monedula*), House sparrow (*Passer domesticus*), Chaffinch (*Fringilla coelebs*) and Starling (*Sturnus vulgaris*) among others.

Several accounts also exist of leucistic birds in southern Africa. Benadie (2007) considers the phenomenon fairly common and mentions examples in Blue Crane (*Anthopoides paradiseus*) to Cape Sugarbird (*Promerops cafer*) and Natal Spurfowl (*Pternistes natalensis*). Conversely, Little (2014) believes leucism to be rare in birds but observed five different species in a short period. These were: African Stonechat (*Saxicola torquatus*), Fiscal Flycatcher

(*Sigelus silens*), Magpie Shrike (*Corvinella melanoleuca*), Spotted Eagle-Owl (*Bubo africanus*) and Ludwig's Bustard (*Neotis ludwigii*). He also reported the finding of a blotchy Cape Glossy Starling (*Lamprotornis nitens*) in the Kalahari.



Figure 1 - A frontal view showing the bright orange-yellow eyes.



Figure 2 - A ventral view showing the colour of its plumage, beak and legs.

Sighting of leucistic Cape Glossy Starling

An almost totally leucistic Cape Glossy Starling was observed by the authors (Fig. 1-3), also in the Kalahari, more precisely at the Twee Rivieren Rest Camp in the Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park, South Africa. The bird, among other members of the flock, was present around No. 10 bungalow and it was quite tolerant to humans. The first sighting took place on 24 September 2016 and we saw it again on 25 September, the day we left. It appears to be resident there.

The bird was of a dirty white colour overall with the exception of its primaries that were dark blue. Its bill and legs were pinkish and the

eyes were the normal bright orange-yellow colour (Roberts, 2012-2013). Its behaviour and call did not differ from other normally coloured starlings of the same species present in the area and the bird was accepted by other members of the flock.

As the bird appeared strong, it would be interesting to follow its life to determine if it is able to pass on its leucistic characteristics to future progenies in the area.



Figure 3 - The leucistic form and a normal Cape Glossy starling for comparison.

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