Noisy Miner lacking grey plumage pigmentation

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At the beginning of 2012 an unusually plumaged Noisy Miner *Manorina melanocephala* was frequently present in my garden at Woodville, NSW (I have since moved to Tasmania). At first glance the bird was white, but closer inspection indicated that the only feathers which are normally grey lacked pigmentation. The black head feathers, green/yellow tinged feathers in the wings and the yellow soft parts were all normally coloured. In flight the effect was dramatic, with the bird appearing all white in stunning contrast to the rest of the flock. The bird was seen regularly until October when it was last seen foraging in a flowering Silky Oak *Grevillea robusta* with other Noisy Miners. It was next seen on one occasion in February 2013 and then again on 27 May 2013. In May 2013 a similarly plumaged bird was photographed in Victoria and described in the link http://comebirdwatching.blogspot.com.au/2013/05/white-noisy-case-of-aberrant-plumage.html.

Schizochroism is characterised by the lack of a single pigment from part or all of the plumage (Guay *et al.* 2012). This instance involved total loss of grey pigmentation, the dominant colour of Noisy Miners. Genetic mutations have long been associated with plumage aberrations and are exploited by bird breeders. However, there are a number of other possible causes including diet, which in this case seems unlikely because the rest of the flock was normal.

Despite its abnormal appearance the schizochroistic miner was accepted by the flock of miners and no antagonistic interactions were observed.

Schizochroistic birds are rare in the wild (Guay *et al.* 2012) and it is possible to speculate that a bird which so obviously stands out against the flock might be preferentially targeted by predators. Consequently its survival for 16 months was of interest as was its periodic occurrence in my garden. Noisy Miners may be less sedentary than is normally accepted.

Higgins *et al.* (2001) mention four Noisy Miners with aberrant plumage, all of which were classed as leucistic. In leucistic birds all pigments are missing from some or all feathers (Guay *et al.* 2012), which was clearly not the case in the bird described in this note.

REFERENCES

Guay, P. J., Potvin D.A. and Robinson, R.W. (2012). Aberrations in Plumage Colouration in Birds. *Australian Field Ornithology* **29**: 23-30.

Higgins, P.J, Peter, J. M. and Steele, W. K. (Eds) (2001). 'Handbook of Australian, New Zealand and Antarctic Birds. Volume 5: Tyrant-flycatchers to Chats'. (Oxford University Press: Melbourne.)