

# Baldness in Common Mynas *Acridotheres tristis* and Rose-ringed Parakeets *Psittacula krameri* in India

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## Records of bald Common Mynas *Acridotheres tristis* from Maharashtra

### Nagpur

On 24 April 2008, two of us (RK & AJ) had gone to the cantonment of Kamptee in Nagpur district, Maharashtra. On our way through the cantonment we sighted a bald Common Myna

Fig 1. A bald Common Myna *Acridotheres tristis*.



Raju Kasambe

*Acridotheres tristis* (Fig. 1). It was totally bald and had no feathers on its head and neck, up to the shoulders. Normally, only the sub-orbital yellow skin of a normal Common Myna is featherless. But this Myna had no feathers over all of its head and neck. The head and shoulders of this bald bird were bright yellow, and the ear openings were

exposed. The remaining plumage looked normal. The bird was continuously begging for food, and hence could have been a fledgling foraging with few 'normal' Common Mynas.

On 12 April 2009, when RK was traveling to Pench Tiger Reserve in Maharashtra, he spotted a bald Common Myna near Mansar village in Nagpur district, which is on the Jabalpur highway. This bird had no feathers on its head and neck, and was foraging with a flock of 4-5 normal-looking Common Mynas.

### Amravati

On 1 June 2003, RK was in Amravati, Maharashtra, when spotted a strange looking Common Myna, which somehow looked like a "tiny vulture". He stopped, noted down the features, and prepared a rough sketch of the bird. It was a bald bird, which had no feathers on its head and neck, as described above.

JW and GW sighted a bald Common Myna at Paratwada in Amravati district on 30 July 2009. It had similar plumage, or the lack of it, as described above.

## Records of bald Common Mynas sighted from other places

An Internet search on various bird groups revealed the following information about bald Common Mynas and Rose-ringed Parakeets in India.

Aditi and Atreyee Ghosh sighted a bald Common Myna feeding with 'normal' birds at Sukhana Lake in Chandigarh on 22 November 2008.

Vaibhav Deshmukh, reported sighting of a bald Common Myna feeding with a normal Common Mynas at Varsoli near Alibag (Maharashtra). As he describes it, the Myna was normal, except its bald head (posted on 9 August 2004, courtesy birdsofbombay).

Amit Gupta reported a completely bald headed Common Myna, at Kandivali East, Mumbai (posted on 8<sup>th</sup> August 2004, courtesy birdsofbombay@yahoo.com).

Jayanthi reported a bald Common Myna near Kille Gaothan Fort (Mumbai), which looked like a "mini-vulture" (as posted on 13 July 2008, courtesy birdsofbombay@yahoo.com).

Ritesh Bagul reported a bald Common Myna at Uran in Mumbai. He described it as "its head was devoid of feathers and completely yellow—it looked a lot like a "mini-vulture" (as posted on 14 July 2008, courtesy birdsofbombay@yahoo.com).

Vishwajit Ruikar also reported one bald Common Myna (place not mentioned) and also photographed the bird but the location of the sighting is not mentioned (courtesy: www.indianaturewatch.net).

## Records of bald Rose-ringed Parakeets *Psittacula krameri*

On 22 June 2008, while watching birds in Maharajbagh garden, in Nagpur city, Maharashtra, at 0800 hours, RK noticed an unusual Rose-ringed Parakeet *Psittacula krameri* feeding along with a flock of normal Rose-ringed Parakeets and Plum-headed Parakeets *P. cyanocephala*. The photograph revealed that the parakeet was bald; it had no feathers on its head, neck, chest; even the belly up to the vent was featherless. Its behaviour looked normal and it was feeding on rice from the ground as all other Parakeets do daily in the Maharajbagh garden. Presumably, this Parakeet was a fledgling. This particular Parakeet looked strange and very different in the flock. Noticeably, the upper mandible was typical red and the lower mandible was black.

On 6 December 2009, TB saw a bald Rose-ringed Parakeet on the terrace of his house. Here he has maintained a bird

Fig 2. Bald Rose-ringed Parakeet *Psittacula krameri*.



Tarun Balpande

feeder and he puts grains as well as crumbs of carrion food from the kitchen. Many bird species visit this feeder including the parakeets. On 9 December 2009, RK and TB saw the same parakeet feeding on the crumbs of *roti* (Fig. 2). This particular parakeet was bald on its head, neck, and underside, up to its vent. Even the thighs were featherless. The upper mandible was typical red, and the lower mandible was black.

## Discussion

Each year Feeder Watchers—a joint research and education project of Cornell Lab of Ornithology, USA and Bird Studied, Canada (<http://www.birds.cornell.edu/pfw/AboutBirdsandFeeding/BaldBirds.htm>), report several cases of 'bald-headed birds,' mostly Blue Jays *Cyanocitta cristata*, and Northern Cardinals *Cardinalis cardinalis*. One possible explanation for this phenomenon is an abnormal replacement of feathers (molt). Most bald-bird reports occur in summer and fall, which are typical molting times. Many of these strange-looking birds may be juveniles undergoing their first prebasic molt, which produces the first winter adult plumage. For some unknown reason, the bald birds may have dropped all of their head feathers at once. Staggered feather replacement is the normal pattern. Other cases of baldness may result from feather mites or lice, or some environmental or nutritional factor. But no one knows for sure, and the condition has not been well studied. Fortunately, new head feathers grow in within a few weeks.

An interesting article on the topic of bald birds was published in the *Buffalo News* (<http://www.acsu.buffalo.edu/~insrig/nature/nw98/baldbirds.html>). A bald Blue Jay was observed in July 2000 by Kathy Karjala from the foothills of the Bridger Mountains near Bozeman, Montana. She reported that the jay began to grow his head feathers back, and the last time she saw it, it was developing a nice little crest.

According to a website on pet bird care "Helium" (<http://www.helium.com/items/8021111-pet-bird-care-common-illnesses-and-diseases-affecting-pet-birds>) baldness in birds is a loss of feathers only on the head. The authors of the website believe that genetics and hormonal imbalance is believed to cause baldness in birds.

## Conclusion

Most of the Indian instances of bald birds refer to Common Myna, and Rose-ringed Parakeet. It seems that all the bald birds described here could be fledglings. But the baldness in the Rose-ringed Parakeet could be due to genetic problems or hormonal imbalance as it had a featherless underside besides the bald head and neck. Or is it that some nestlings of Common Mynas and Rose-ringed Parakeets fledge before the full feather cover is developed on the body? The authors think that further research is needed to answer the exact causes of baldness in birds reported here.

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