

# RESEARCH NOTES

# НАУЧНЫЕ ЗАМЕТКИ

## FIRST RECORD ON MELANISM IN *SEMNOPITHECUS PRIAM* FROM TAMIL NADU, INDIA

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*Semnopithecus priam* is a Near Threatened species found in southern India and Sri Lanka. On 25 July 2020, a melanistic *S. priam* individual was observed in Nilgiris, Tamil Nadu, India. This observation revealed that it is the first known case of melanism in *Semnopithecus priam* in India and its distributional range.

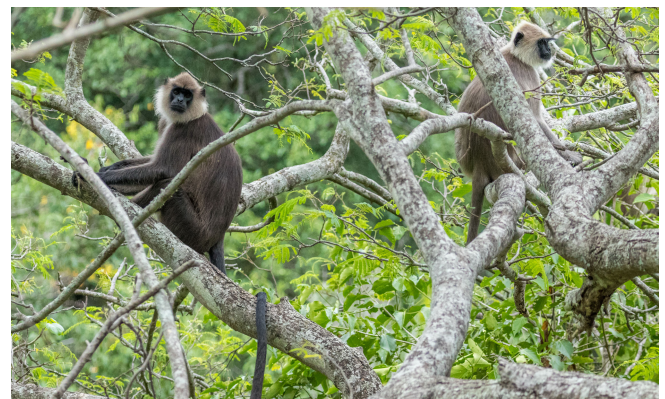
**Key words:** Cercopithecidae, mammal, Nilgiris, primate, Western Ghats

Melanism is a colour polymorphism common in various groups of organisms, in which the skin/fur/plumage is darker than one considers as normal or «wild» phenotype. *Semnopithecus priam* Blyth, 1844 is a Near Threatened Old World monkey. It is widely spread in southern India, mainly on the eastern side of the Deccan plateau, Eastern Ghats, Western Ghats, east of the River Moyar, on the eastern slopes of the southern part of Western Ghats and the plains of Tamil Nadu (Chetan et al., 2014) and in Sri Lanka. In India, a colour aberration in mammals is comprehensively documented (Mahabal et al., 2019). However, in primates, it has been recorded only in *Macaca assamensis* McClelland, 1840, *M. mulatta* Zimmermann, 1780, and *M. radiata* É. Geoffroy, 1812. So, the present note represents the first known case of melanism in *S. priam* in Nilgiris, Western Ghats, Southern India.

On 25 July 2020, at 16:30 h, during the bird-watching in Mulli areas (76.73068°N, 11.21721°E) of the Nilgiris, Tamil Nadu, India, we observed a troop of *S. priam*. Within the troop, body and tail-coat colour of one of adult male individuals was completely darker (black), while its head was normally coloured like other individuals. Therefore, we concluded that the *S. priam* adult was affected melanism. Then, we photographed the individuals for further considering (Fig.).

Melanism can be defined as the excessive deposition of the pigment melanin resulting in an atypically dark individual (Kettlewell, 1973). Such colour aberration is quite common in mam-

mals (Caro, 2005). The natural coat colour of the *S. priam* pelage is brownish to light-grey and silky in appearance. The ventrum is a creamy-yellow in colour and the infants are black. The natal coat colour of one individual at adulthood was completely different (Menon, 2014). The tropical ecosystem supports the hypothesis that melanism can provide an adaptive advantage under certain ecological conditions (Caro, 2005; Allen et al., 2010). Moreover, there is the hypothesis of an association between darker individuals and wetter areas with dense vegetation (Gloger, 1833; Cott, 1940; Ortolani & Caro, 1996; Ulmer, 1941). Habitat fragmentation, stress and inbreeding are possible elements for melanism occurrence (Tougas, 2011; Ramakrishnan et al., 2016). In this juncture, more observation is warranted to predict the reason behind this kind of melanism in *S. priam* in Nilgiris.



**Fig.** The melanistic *Semnopithecus priam* individual in Mulli, Nilgiris, Tamil Nadu, India.

In conclusion, further studies must be encouraged to report the records of colour aberration in wildlife. This is necessary for a better understanding of this phenomenon and its insights into the ecological and physiological implications of this condition considerably affecting the animal survival (Samson et al., 2017).

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## ПЕРВОЕ УКАЗАНИЕ МЕЛАНИЗМА ДЛЯ *SEMNOPITHECUS PRIAM* ИЗ ТАМИЛ НАДУ (ИНДИЯ)

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*Semnopithecus priam* является видом, близком к угрожаемому состоянию на территории Южной Индии и Шри Ланки. Меланистическая особь *S. priam* была обнаружена в округе Нилгири (штат Тамил Наду, Индия) 25 июля 2020 г. Данное наблюдение показало, что это первый известный случай меланизма для *S. priam* как в Индии, так и в пределах всего ареала вида.

**Ключевые слова:** Cercopithecidae, Западные Гаты, млекопитающее, округ Нилгири, примат