

# A first record of albinism in Jungle Palm Squirrels *Funambulus tristriatus* (Rodentia: Sciuridea) from India

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Jungle Palm Squirrel or Jungle-striped squirrel *Funambulus tristriatus* (Waterhouse, 1837) (Rodentia: Sciuridae) is a blackish-brown, bushy tailed squirrel. It is endemic to the Western Ghats of India and occurs in Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Goa and Maharashtra. It is diurnal and semi-arboreal and inhabits tropical evergreen forest, moist-deciduous forest, also in shrubs, plantations and garden (Molur *et. al* 2005, Alfred *et. al* 2006, Pradhan and Talmale 2012, Talmale 2013). As per the recent IUCN status it is categorized as Least Concern (Molur and Nameer 2008, Talmale 2013).

On 24<sup>th</sup> morning the second author (AM) noticed a total white bushy tailed albino squirrel climbing on coconut tree at 'Miramar Residency' (15° 29'4.6824" N and 73° 48'28.8792" E), Panjim, Goa, India. Later on, it was again sighted in the open-air cafeteria situated at ground floor of the hotel campus. Three normal-coloured squirrels were also sighted in the same area. When enquired with the catering staff they said that they have noticed such white squirrels with reddish eyes at a time and they are observing them for at least last one and a half year.

The first and third authors (AS and AN) visited this place during 6-7 July, 2015 especially for the observations and to take the photographs of albino and normal-coloured squirrels. They noticed two albino squirrels in the hotel campus, but managed to take a photograph of only one albino squirrel having blood red eyes with pinkish snout, ears and fore limbs (Fig. 1). Later on, all photographs (Fig. 1 to 4) were sent to the expert of Mammal section, ZSI, Jabalpur, M.P. for the identification. He identified and confirmed the squirrel as Jungle Palm Squirrel *F. tristriatus* on the basis of following distinctive characters: The darker pelage; stripes sub-equal and usually not extending to root of the tail; tail most often shorter than head and body; and face, forehead, back and haunches tinged with rusty red colour (Alfred *et. al.* 2006, Pradhan and Talmale 2012, Talmale 2013). While examining the photo (Fig. 2) we noticed a normal-coloured squirrel along with another squirrel having white patches on hind limb and on lateral side and white hairs mixed with normal-coloured hairs in tail region. Eyes, snout, ears and limbs look normal-coloured, hence, probably this could be a partial leucistic squirrel. Fig. 3 depicts the same partial leucistic squirrel on opposite side with same pattern of white patches indicating a bilateral symmetry.

A perusal of pertinent literature revealed that there are few cases of albino Five-striped Palm Squirrels



**Fig 1. Albino Jungle Palm Squirrel *Funambulus tristriatus***



**Fig 2. Partially leucistic with normal coloured Jungle Palm Squirrel**

*Funambulus pennantii* Wroughton, reported from India (Chaturvedi and Ghose 1984, Mahabal *et. al.* 2005), however, there were no previous instances of any type of colour aberrations recorded in the Jungle Palm Squirrel *F. tristriatus*.

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**Table 1. Aberrant and normal-coloured Jungle Palm Squirrels residing at 'Miramar Residency', Panjim, Goa**

Sr No.	Type of colour aberration	No. of squirrel	Observations
1	Albinism	2	Catering staff from 2014 till June 2015. All authors during 23-25 April, 2015 and 6-7 July, 2015.
2	Partial Leucism (bilaterally symmetrical)	1	Authors (AS and AN) during July, 2015.
3	Normal-coloured	3 to 4	All authors and catering staff



**Fig 3. Partially leucistic Jungle Palm Squirrel**



**Fig 4. Normal-coloured Jungle Palm Squirrel**

In the present case we have noticed two types of colour aberrations-albinism and partial (bilaterally symmetrical) leucism in the Jungle Palm Squirrel residing along with normal-coloured squirrels in a small campus of a hotel in Goa (Table 1). Further, the present sighting could be the first record of colour aberrations in Jungle Palm Squirrel *F. tristriatus* from India.

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