

# The first record of Albino Chital (*Axis axis*) in Satkosia Tiger Reserve, Odisha

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## Sighting of albino chital fawn

On 05 June, 2014 one of us (RNP) sighted and recorded on video the presence of an albino fawn of Chital deer (*Axis axis*) in Satkosia Tiger Reserve, Odisha, India. It was 1740 hrs and the sun was about to set. The fawn was in a herd of 13 deer that were in normal spot deer and colour. The herd comprised of seven adult females, 3 adult males and three normal fawns. The antlers of males were at the velvet stage measuring 3-4" high.

The herd of chital was observed at Kantarsingh water-harvesting-structure (WHS) on a grassy patch near the watch tower. The place is located on 20°38'7" N and 84° 68' 26" E under Labangi Section of Pampasar Forest Range (Image 5). The Chital herd was sighted for about 20 minutes out of the total sitting which RNP made at the WHS from 1410 to 1800 hrs. All observations were through the lens of an HD-SX50 Canon camera used for field record.

The body colour of the albino fawn was completely snow-white. Only a few faint and creamy spots were visible on the body. Albinism is inferred from the pink coloured eyes and nasal tips, and white hairs on the eye-brow (Image-1, 2, 3, 4).

## Previous records on Albino Chital

The first albino chital on record is given by Atkinson (1932) who sent two unprintable photographs of one animal assumed to have been shot in Dehra 'Doon'. It was snow-white in colour with faint silky white spots visible in bright light. Below the knees the body was slightly coloured. The eyes and hooves were pink.

The second record on chital is from Ranthambhore Tiger Reserve.



**Image-1. Front facing albino chital fawn in group in Satkosia Tiger Reserve on 05 June 2014 showing, pinkish eyes, pinkish nose and white eye brow.**



**Image-2. Pinkish ear of albino chital fawn visible as it faces away from camera and stands in group in Satkosia Tiger Reserve, 05 June 2014**

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**Image-3. Albino fawn with adult male Chital in Satkosia Tiger Reserve, 05 June 2014.**



**Image-4. Side view of head and body of albino fawn standing with adult female in Satkosia Tiger Reserve, 05 June 2014**

It is about an albino mother with albino fawn photographed on 12 January 2012 at Pipli deh near Anantpura chawki of Kundera Range (Prabu, *et al* 2013). The white bodied mother and calf are clear contrasts near a normal doe. The photograph, though not sharp and clear, provides technical proof of at least the mother being albino as the pinkish nose of the mother can be discerned.

The photographs at <http://www.indianaturewatch.net/displayimage.php?id=311321> and <http://www.indianaturewatch.net/displayimage.php?id=347276> loaded on 8 March 2012 and 29 July 2012, respectively are with 'Ranthambhore' and 'albino' tags (Parashar 2012a,b). These chital are different from the photograph by Prabu *et al* (2013). The 'albino' tag for mother and calf in Parashar (2012a, b) is not clear as the eyes

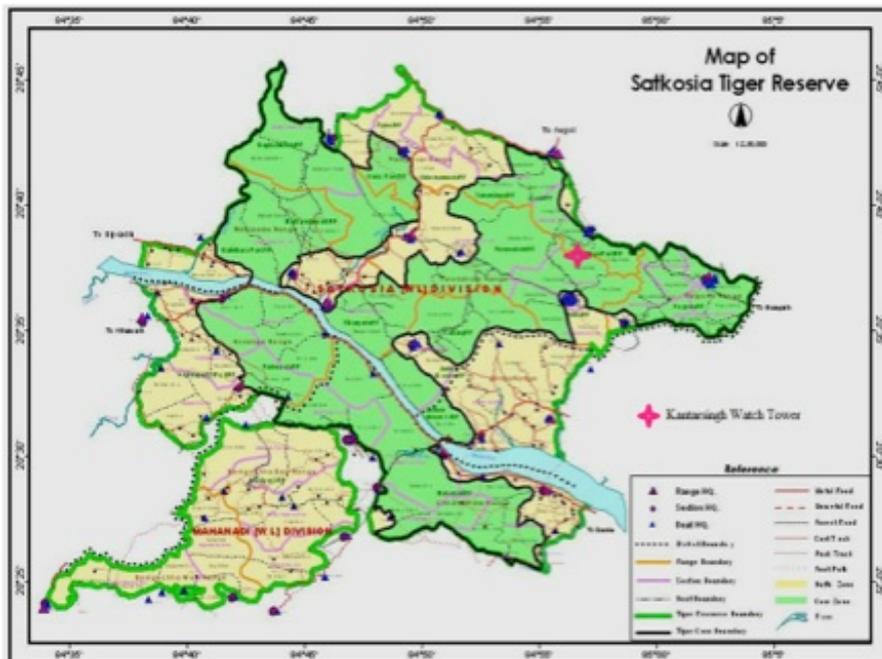
and nostrils are dark in colour instead of being pinkish on 'white' body. It is possible that there may be more number of 'white' and 'albino' chital in Ranthambhore than photographed.

In newspaper reports and blogs on the web there are a few sightings and photographs of chital with 'albino' tag. The photograph of chital by Mr. S.G. Neginhal (Staff Reporter, The Hindu 2008) from Nagarhole National Park does not show characteristic pinkish colour for nasal region and eye. Therefore, it is a 'white' chital. The chital born in Ahmedabad Zoo labeled 'albino' also has dark eyes and dark nose (Times of India, 21 April 2010) is also a 'white' fawn. However, Ahmedabad Zoo has the earliest and maximum number albino species in captivity (Anon., 1986).

The 'albino' and 'white' forms can appear in any population of chital at any time, and the initial confusion could be justified with reasons. However, for keeping the records straight the researchers, bloggers and photographers may, if consider necessary, confirm their reports about 'albino' chital from Nagarhole, Bandipur, Pench, Katerniyaghat and Sonanadi Wildlife Sanctuary (Panda 2009, Prabu 2013, Dasgupta 2014, Misra 2014, and <http://www.united21resortcorbett.com/sonanadi-wildlife-sanctuary.aspx> 2014). Similarly, report of albino chital from Jamshedpur Zoo (Mohan 2014) and other zoos may also be rectified, if necessary. Irrespective of whether an animal is 'normal', 'white' or 'albino', these are of biological interest, and up on seizure (example, Dey 2000) a case will face the same legal journey.

#### **The first Albino record for Satkosia Tiger Reserve**

It is not known if Shikaris who were active in and around before the enforcement of the Wildlife Act, 1972 have come across any



**Image-5. Location map of Kantarsingh Watch Tower in Satkosia Tiger Reserve where albino chital fawn was sighted on 05 June 2014**

albino chital or other albino mammal in Satkosia. As a researcher I (LAKS) resided and worked in river Mahanadi and the adjoining Satkosia forests extensively from 1975 to 1981 and maintained experience and interactions from 1990. During these years I have not come across any instance of albino Chital or any other herbivore from Satkosia. The present report is the first known record with photograph of albino Chital fawn in the wild in Satkosia Tiger Reserve.

#### Acknowledgement

The authors wish to record their thanks to Sarbasree S. S. Srivastava, PCCF (Wildlife) & Chief Wildlife Warden, Odisha for facilities and encouragement; and S. Md. T. Rahman- Dy. Director & DFO, Suwendu Behera- ACF, Monaj Patra- Forester, Sahadeb Soren, FG and Akhya Kumar Nayak, FG for cooperation and help in the field.

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