Reptilian taxa display a huge variety of colors arranged in diverse patterns with functions that include: thermoregulation, protection of vital organs, warning, communication, mimicry, camouflage, and aids in vision (Jackson et al. 1976; Bechtel 1978, 1991). Inherited color anomalies, such as albinism and leucism, are well known in many animal species, including snakes (Bechtel 1991). Albinism in snakes in nature is not unknown, although they are rare, especially in adult individuals (Krekcik 2008). Herein we report the first case of albinism in a Monocled Cobra (Naja kaouthia) from northeastern India.

At about 1400 h on 11 January 2020, we rescued a Monocled Cobra (Fig. 1) from inside the Kuwariitol High School in Kaliabor, Assam, India (26°32’55.4”N, 92°55’58.3”E). The juvenile snake was identified by the distinctive O-shaped or monocellate mark on its hood. It was yellowish with a prominent chrome-white hood mark and eyes and tongue were pink, which are characteristics of albinism (e.g., Bechtel 1991; Silvestre et al. 2009; Silva et al. 2010; Abegg et al. 2015). After taking photographs, we released the snake into its natural habitat.

Although albinism has been recorded in a variety of Indian species of snakes (e.g., Hoshing et al. 2013; Jadhav et al. 2014; Mahabal and Thakur 2014; Adimalliaiah and Vyas 2015; Thakur and Trivedi 2018; Deshmukh et al. 2020), including Spectacled Cobras (Naja naja) from several localities (e.g., Mahabal and Thakur 2014; Fellows 2018), and Chanhome et al. (1998) indicated that “albinos with red eyes are not uncommon” when referring to N. kaouthia in Thailand, this is the first record of albinism in a Monocled Cobra from northeastern India.

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Literature Cited


