
BRITISH BIRDS RARITIES COMMITTEE



RARITY REPORT FORM

Species Black-headed Wagtail (or intergrade)
Age/sex Male (age uncertain, but possibly first-summer)
Date seen 18th April 2010 (last seen on 21st I think)
Place
Name Cresswell Pond
Grid reference
County/recording area Northumberland

Observer Ian Fisher (NOT FINDER OR IDENTIFIER)
Other observers Many, inc Jimmy Steele, Andy McLevy, Alan Curry, Tim Cleeves, Stef McElwee, Stewart Sexton, Mike Hodgson
Who first saw the bird? Don't know
Who first identified it? Don't know
Any who disagree? No
Optical aids Zeiss 10 x 40, Canon D1 Mk 2 + 500mm + 1.4 converter
Distance from bird Closest about 30 meters? Always kept its distance
Was the bird photographed? Yes
Have the photographs been published? One is on the NTBC website (<http://www.ntbc.org.uk/>) 2010 gallery page
Was the bird videoed? Don't know
Species present for comparison Yellow Wagtail & Pied & White Wagtails
Which species were alongside the bird Yellow Wagtail (flavissima)
Observer(s) experience of the species None of Black-headed
Observer(s) experience of similar species Previously have seen Blue-headed, Grey-headed (thou not same day or previously male) & M. f. taivana

Weather Howling ENE, cold and persisting down with rain!
Wind direction ENE
Force 4+
Light conditions Not bad considering
Visibility Ok
Rain, mist, etc Pissing down
Cloud cover 100%

Submitter (if different from above)
Name/Address
Contact telephone

Description What follows is meant to be a supporting description to those of the finder.

At about 1030 on 18th April I was on my way to photograph a Grasshopper Warbler at Arcot Pond, when I received a phone call from Stef McElwee to let me know a possible Black-headed Wagtail had been seen at Cresswell Pond. I phoned a couple of people for additional information but got nowhere. A few minutes later Stef phoned me back to say Andy McLevy was watching it! I high-tailed it up to Cresswell (keeping with-in

Description continued..

the speed limits!) and met several birders on site. The bird had just disappeared out of site, so I started scanning the field. After about five or so minutes I heard an unfamiliar call coming from my left. I locked onto the bird making the noise and was delighted to see the Black-headed Wagtail flying back into the field. It landed about 35-40 meters away from our watch point. It was obviously a Black-headed Wagtail, so it was time to get the camera out and set up (as my scope was knackered) in the hope it would come a bit closer. By this time Jimmy Steele had arrived and got the bird in his scope and announced that it had some kind of supercillium (which was fairly obvious even at distance), so was probably not a pure feldegg!

I watched the bird over the next 3 hours getting totally soaked and just about froze all my extremities off – why did I leave my gloves in the car! In total I took about 450 photographs of the bird at various ranges (the closest being about 25-30 meters) and light conditions. The following description is based on my notes and my photographs.

This bird has caused some debate and discussion as to its parentage amongst local birders, but was still stunning whatever it's parentage!

General: Obviously a yellow wagtail ssp. With a black head, bright yellow underparts and a green mantle.

Age/Sex: The dullness of the head colour and the extent of the black on the nape (i.e. not reaching the mantle) + fairly brown primaries may indicate that this was a first-summer male?

Bare Parts:

Bill – Quite a 'spiky' & to me, deep based bill, all black in colour (see pic 1). Legs – black, Eye – dark.

Upperparts:

Head – The forehead, crown, most of nape, lores and ear coverts were a uniform black (not glossy) with the exception of a narrow white supra-loral stripe extending from the base of the bill and flaring slightly before the eye. After the eye there was a few paler feathers hinting at a brief rear (post ocular) super (see plate 1). The extent of this post ocular 'super' behind the eye varied depending on the position of the birds head, on some views it could be non-descript and on others it could look fairly obvious! The pattern was exactly the same on both sides of the birds head. There was also one white feather immediately above the bill on the forehead (see pic 7). The lower edge of the black on the ear coverts came to an inverted peak just below and slightly behind the eye (see pic 2). The rear nape was green (as mantle) and was diffusely demarcated from the black (see pic 6).

The mantle, scapulars and uppertail coverts were 'pea' green (darker than the nearby Yellow Wagtails) and looked unmarked, although one of my photos shows dark 'streaks' on the mantle but this could just be wet feathers matting due to the weather (see pic 3). I did not see the rump. The tail was similar in length to the accompanying Yellow Wags and was black with white outer feathers.

Wings: The primaries and primary coverts were brownish (unmoulted?) and from the photographs clearly contrast with the blacker (moulted?) Alula (see pic 4). The Greater Coverts were blackish with white edges & tips, the tips forming a narrow wing bar. The Median Coverts were black with broad whitish/yellow tips, these tips could look either white or yellowish (see pics 1 & 5)! The Lesser Coverts were centered dark green with broad yellowish tips; more so near the leading edge of the wing (see pics 4 & 6). The secondaries were blackish (?) with at least some whitish edges (see pics 1 & 3) and the tertials were blackish with whitish edges. The tertials and Greater Coverts appeared moderately worn and (?) of one generation (see pic 6). The underwing coverts were pale yellowish (from photographs – see pic 4).

Underparts:

All underparts were a deep yellow (brighter than on the Yellow Wagtails nearby) and were particularly more intense on the breast. The undertail coverts were slightly paler than the rest of the underparts. All underparts were unmarked. The only exceptions to the above were a very narrow white chin and submoustacial, the latter reaching from the bill base to half way to the eye (see pic 1).

Call:

I heard the bird call twice when it came into land and I described it as hoarser than Yellow but not rasping. I also canvassed the transcriptions of the call from two other birders who also heard it call – Alan Curry and Tim Cleeves. AC described it as hoarse, throaty or rasping, lacking the sweet high tones of Yellow Wagtail and TC described it as a 'buzzing' pipit-like BBRRRZZP. It would have been interesting to have been all together to see if we were all describing the same call!

Is this record 100% certain?

Yes

Pic 1



Pic 2



Pic 3



Pic 4



Pic 5



Pic 6



Pic 7

