



British Birds Rarities Committee

Rarity Form

Email to: secretary@bbrc.org.uk

This form has been designed to be used electronically. Your submission will be processed far more quickly and accurately if it is typed rather than handwritten.

To move to the next field simply press 'Tab' then 'End' and start typing.

Note: If attaching images please send them as separate files and not within this Word document.

Species: 'Northeastern Yellow Wagtail' Motacilla (flava) tschutschensis	
Date first seen: 17 th October 2009	Date last seen: 22 nd October 2009
No. of Birds: 1	Age/Sex: First-winter, presumed male
County: Norfolk	Location: Titchwell
Please fill in your email address to ensure that you get an acknowledgement	
Finder: Unknown	Email:
Identifier (if different): A M Stoddart	Email:
Submitter (if different):	Email:
Other observers: S Lister (and no doubt hundreds of visitors to Titchwell)	
Any who disagrees with identification? No	
Optical aids: x30 binoculars, x30 telescope	
Distance from bird: Down to 30 yards	
Have you enclosed photographs? Yes	Was the bird videoed? No
If photos are available on public websites (BirdGuides & Surfbirds etc) then please give www address: Other photos are on Birdforum under 'Blue-headed Wagtail Titchwell'	
Have the photographs been published in magazines? If so, where: No	
Species present for comparison: None relevant	
Which species were alongside the bird: None	
Observer(s) experience of the species: Familiar with tschutschensis in South Korea. Also a 'harsh caller' flava Fair Isle September 1998.	
Observer(s) experience of similar species on the same day or previously: Very familiar with flavissima, flava, thunbergi, beema and feldegg (including 'dombrowskii' and 'superciliaris'), also some experience of iberiae. In South Korea some experience of plexa, macronyx and taivana.	
Weather (general description): Light winds, good sunshine	
Wind direction and Force: Light westerly winds	
Light conditions (good, dull, etc & sun behind, side etc): Excellent light	
Visibility (distance): Excellent, many miles	
Rain, mist, etc: None	
Cloud cover: None	
And finally, is the record 100% certain? No - see 'Discussion'	

Hit 'Page Down' key several times to move to Description section

Description:

'Northeastern Yellow Wagtail' *tshutschensis* Titchwell 17th-22nd October 2009

Circumstances

A 'Blue-headed Wagtail' was reported from Titchwell from 17th-22nd October 2009. On the latter date I was passing the reserve and called in to see the bird. A Blue-headed Wagtail in autumn in Norfolk would be exceptional, and one in mid/late October would be especially so. I was therefore open-minded about what the bird might prove to be and anxious to hear it call. The bird was skulking in the edge of a reedbed rather in the manner of a crane but eventually it gave good views in the open and I obtained a series of photographs, the best of which is attached. Sadly, the bird never called when I was present. However, I subsequently learnt that Steve Lister had heard the bird give harsh calls on 17th (though he had only seen the bird in flight) and he kindly sent me his call transcription. This submission therefore comprises my description and photographs of the bird from 22nd and Steve Lister's call transcription from 17th.

Size and Structure

As Yellow Wagtail. Though its significance may be questionable, some photographs show a very long hind claw.

Plumage

The first step was to age the bird. The fringes to the wing coverts and tertials are whitish, contrasting strongly with the dark feather centres. Furthermore, a 'moult contrast' can be seen in the median and greater coverts. The bird must therefore be a first-winter, albeit quite an 'advanced' individual.

Forehead, crown and nape a rather dark bluey-grey. Supercilia long and white but narrow and somewhat 'Arctic Warbler-like', not reaching the bill base. Lores and ear coverts also dark bluey-grey, darker on the lores and with a very slightly paler area in the centre of the ear coverts. A white lower eyelid contrasting with the dark ear coverts was most striking. Mantle, scapulars and rump steely-grey, strongly washed bright mossy green, uppertail coverts dark-centred and fringed grey. Remiges dark greyish, crisply fringed whitish giving two good 'wing bars'. Tail feathers dark grey, outer tail feathers white. Underparts dirty white, cleanest white on the throat (where no yellow present) but with smudgy brownish 'clouding' at the breast-sides (and slightly in the breast centre) and soft yellow hues coming through on the flanks and undertail coverts.

Bare Parts

Bill and legs dark.

Call

Steve Lister noted the call as follows:-

'The call was very striking, different to typical flavissima or other western races.....a 'sh-r-rip' rather than the normal flava or flavissima 'seep', very different to my ears, more like an eastern subspecies.'

Steve's notes make it clear that this was a normal flight call, not the harsher agitated alarm call of a western form.

Discussion

Given its harsh calls, this bird cannot be a Blue-headed Wagtail, as reported, and given the autumn status of Blue-headed Wagtail in Norfolk (effectively undocumented) and the late date (mid/late October), the overwhelming likelihood must be that this bird has a northeastern origin. Furthermore, its appearance seems fully consistent with *tshutschensis*. There remains of course the issue of eliminating 'harsh callers' from the 'southern Yellow Wagtail group'. Given the bird's appearance, *iberiae* is the only real candidate but its head pattern seems at variance with typical *iberiae*. Furthermore, mid/late October hardly seems a prime time for *iberiae* and it should of course be remembered that this form is not on the British List.

Any submission of an 'eastern' Yellow Wagtail will of course be contentious. However, such late autumn 'harsh callers' are clearly of relatively regular occurrence in Britain and it seems sensible therefore to at least place these birds on record, particularly as there are good photographs and a good call transcription from a well-known, experienced observer. I will let BBRC decide whether to treat this as a 'formal' or an 'informal' submission.





