

Probable breeding of the Black-eared Wheatear *Oenanthe hispanica melanoleuca* on Cyprus

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The Black-eared Wheatear *Oenanthe hispanica* of the subspecies *melanoleuca* [hereafter *melanoleuca*] breeds in the eastern Mediterranean region around Cyprus *eg* in Greece, Turkey, Jordan, Israel and Egypt (Hagemeijer & Blair 1997, Snow & Perrins 1998). However, there is no breeding record from Cyprus although there are suitable habitats and many migrating *melanoleuca* are observed during spring (Bannerman & Bannerman 1958, Flint & Stewart 1992, Randler *et al* 2010, Whaley & Dawes 2003).

Bannerman & Bannerman (1958) gave 21 April as the date of the last spring record. Flint & Stewart (1992) wrote "last seen early-mid May, once obtained late May . . ." Records from 2000–2008 provided by BirdLife Cyprus, show that the migration period of Black-eared Wheatear effectively ends in mid-May (Figure 1). There were two June records during this period: a single of unspecified sex at Anarita park 16 June 2001 (Gordon 2001) and a female at Kambia area 19 June 2007 (Richardson 2007). Whaley & Dawes (2003) wondered why *melanoleuca* does not breed on Cyprus, since it breeds in nearby countries of similar latitude, with similar habitats and altitude. They observed a male *melanoleuca* with unidentified juveniles near Armou on 9 June 1994, an apparent pair there on 28 April 1997 and a singing male with a nearby female near Inia on 7 April 1995.

CR found a singing male *melanoleuca* with a dark throat on 21 and 22 May 2009 near Androlikou village (Figure 2). The male was accompanied by a female there on 29 May. Both individuals were observed in an olive grove, used the olive grove tracks for feeding (Plate 2) and used parts of the surrounding valley, with less bush vegetation, for song posts (Plate 3). AC saw both the male and female (Plate 1) feeding on a track near the olive grove on 4 June. On 9 June, 06.30–10.30 h, neither bird was seen nor song heard, but on 14 June the female was seen briefly in the olive grove by AC. The birds were not detected on 20 and 27 June.

These observations of a *melanoleuca* pair strongly suggest a breeding attempt in 2009. In terms of the classification of the EBCC Atlas (Hagemeijer & Blair 1997), it is regarded as probable breeding (cat. B.3 "Pair observed in suitable nesting habitat in breeding season", and B.4 "Permanent territory presumed through registration of territorial behaviour (song, etc.) on at least two different days a week or more apart at the same place"). Some

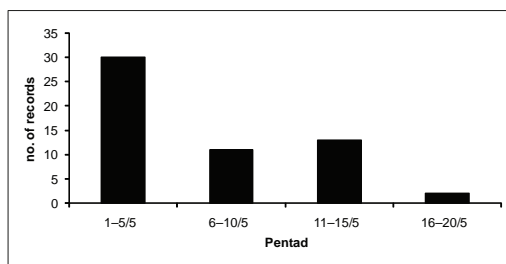


Figure 1. Records of Black-eared Wheatear *Oenanthe hispanica* on Cyprus May 2000–2008 (BirdLife Cyprus), depicted in pentads (five-day-totals, N = 56 records).

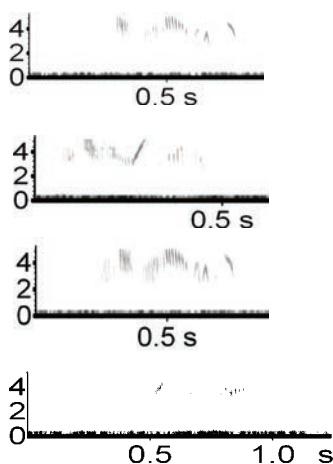


Figure 2. Sonograms of a singing male Black-eared Wheatear *O. h. melanoleuca* near Androlikou, Cyprus, 21 May 2009. X-axis time, y-axis frequency in kHz.



Plate 1. Female Black-eared Wheatear *O. h. melanoleuca* near Androlikou, Cyprus, 4 June 2009. © Gwen Crabtree



Plate 2. (left) The olive grove and tracks near Androlikou, Cyprus. © C Randler



Plate 3. (right) The surrounding valley near Androlikou, Cyprus. © C Randler

previous authors supposed that the absence of *melanoleuca* is due to competition with the resident endemic wheatear, the common and widespread *O. cypriaca*, but *O. cypriaca* has different habitat preferences compared to *O. hispanica*, *O. oenanthe* and *O. isabellina* (Randler *et al* 2010). In nearby countries up to four *Oenanthe* species coexist (Hagemeyer & Blair 1997).

The present data indicate that *melanoleuca* might be a regular but scarce breeder on Cyprus. Further work should focus on areas in the lower hill regions and away from the coastal migration hotspots. To the west, on Rhodes, *melanoleuca* is most common from 0–600 m asl with a mean at 220 m (Jochen Hölzinger pers comm). The timing of the breeding season may well be similar to that of breeders of the surrounding eastern Mediterranean region, so singing males should be sought from mid-April and juveniles from the end of May until the end of June (Panov 2005). Special attention should be paid to possible hybridisation, which is common in the genus *Oenanthe* especially between Black-eared and Pied *O. pleschanka* Wheatears (Randler 2004).

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Many thanks to Colin Richardson, bird recorder of BirdLife Cyprus, for providing the 2000–2008 migration period data. Dr Jochen Hölzinger gave detailed comments on the situation on Rhodes and encouraging words for searching for the Black-eared Wheatear on Cyprus.

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