

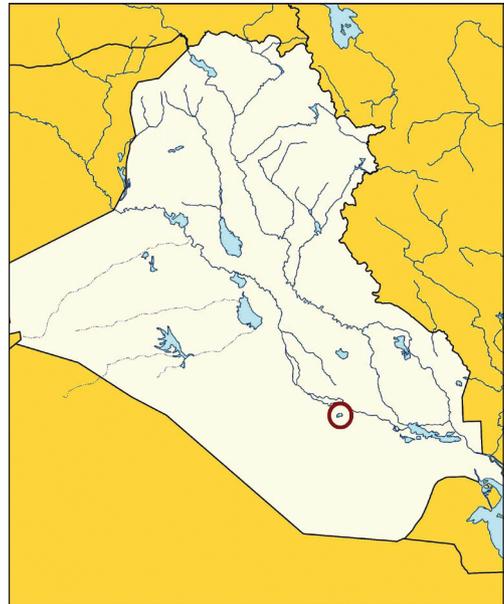
# First record of White-crowned Black Wheatear *Oenanthe leucopyga* for Iraq

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During the 2010 winter survey of the Key Biodiversity Areas project of Nature Iraq, the team was surveying Sawa lake (31° 19' 03.6" N, 44° 59' 35.9" E, Figure 1), Muthanna governorate, Iraq, on 19 February 2010. Sawa lake is a small, closed, brackish lake with neither water inlet nor outlet, as it is fed by underground water. It looks like a large oasis but with no plant cover at its margins save for surrounding desert shrubs and neighbouring palm groves.

While birding there that day with Kadhum Jawad and Mohammed Turki, I spotted a black-and-white wheatear that I first thought was a dark morph Mourning Wheatear *Oenanthe lugens*. As it flew I noticed that the bird did not have the black terminal tail band of most wheatears. The bird was observed for about ten minutes, from a vehicle and whilst following it among rocks. The bird was not easily approached and was observed from c15–50 m away. Photos were taken (Plates 1 & 2). The weather during the observation was clear and sunny, and with no wind.

During the observation, the bird was shy, very restless and cautious of any sudden or close movements, and silent as well. It was a comparatively large-sized wheatear with black head, neck, and underparts that reached down to the thigh. The bird had a short white line above an eye. The back was black extending to the white rump. The vent and undertail coverts were white. The



**Figure 1.** Red circle indicates location of Sawa lake, site of Iraq's first record of White-crowned Black Wheatear *Oenanthe leucopyga*. Surrounding countries are shown in orange and the head of the Gulf is lower right.



**Plates 1 & 2.** White-crowned Black Wheatear *Oenanthe leucopyga* at Sawa lake, southern Iraq, 19 February 2010. © Mudhafar A Salim/Nature Iraq

central feathers of the tail were black, while the outer ones were white and there was no black terminal tail band. The black colour of the upper and under parts was glossy but the primaries had a brownish shade. Legs were black and so was the bill. It was an immature White-crowned Black Wheatear *Oenanthe leucopyga*. The record has been accepted by the Iraqi Bird Recording Committee, IBRC, as the first for Iraq.

The White-crowned Black Wheatear occurs in desert habitats over North Africa and eastwards to northern Saudi Arabia (Jennings *et al* 2009) and southern and western Jordan (Andrews 1995). The species has been claimed twice for Syria (Murdoch & Betton 2008) and it is a rare visitor to Kuwait (Gregory 2005). Allouse referred to the possibility of occurrence of this species in Iraq after it was found in Ahwaz, southwest Iran (Allouse 1953, 1963) though Scott & Adhami (2006) listed *O. leucopyga* as a vagrant to Iran with no records for at least 50 years.

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