

First confirmed record of Whinchat *Saxicola rubetra* from Afghanistan

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On 29 May 2018 at 15.25 h AMR saw in Qila-e Panja village (Wakhan district, Badakhshan province, Afghanistan), a small passerine moving on the ground with small hops, in a wet meadow with scattered sea buckthorn *Hippophae rhamnoides* shrubs. It was feeding on insects or other small invertebrates. Initially thought to be one of the many Siberian stonechats *Saxicola maura* present in the area, a prominent white supercilium and relatively long wings piqued our curiosity. It had a buff-streaked blackish face and crown, a strong white malar stripe, and a bright orange throat and breast. The upperparts and rump were mottled dark, the tail was dark brown with white outer feathers. The bird was observed for 10–15 minutes and good photographs were taken (Plates 1,2). SO confirmed that it was a male Whinchat *Saxicola rubetra* in breeding plumage.

The Whinchat is a migratory passerine breeding in Europe and western Asia, east to the Ob river basin in Russia and wintering in tropical Africa (Collar & Garcia 2018). Although Afghanistan could be part of the migratory flyway of individuals from the easternmost Asian populations, there has been so far only a single observer sight record from Afghanistan and that needs verification (Smith 1974). The staff of the Wildlife Conservation Society have been present continuously in Wakhan district (which became a national park in 2014) since July 2006 and has recorded all bird observations in a database, but ours is the first confirmed record of Whinchat in Wakhan and Afghanistan.



Plate 1. A male Whinchat *Saxicola rubetra* in breeding plumage, Wakhan national park, Afghanistan 29 May 2018.



Plate 2. A male Whinchat *Saxicola rubetra* in breeding plumage, Wakhan national park, Afghanistan 29 May 2018.

Comprehensive ornithological surveys of Wakhan have also been carried out in July–August 2006 (Reza 2006), September–October 2007 (Ayé 2007) and June 2008 (Timmins 2008) but did not record the species.

LITERATURE CITED

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