

First record of White-headed Yellow Wagtail *Motacilla flava leucocephala* for Azerbaijan

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At 09.25 h on 12 April 2012, whilst conducting a bird migration study at Besh Barmag bottleneck in Azerbaijan (40° 59' N, 49° 13' E, c80 km northwest of Baku, see Heiss 2013), we found a White-headed Yellow Wagtail *Motacilla flava leucocephala*. It was observed and photographed for c30 minutes. The bird was feeding on the ground and was well watched from a distance of less than 10 m. The White-headed Yellow Wagtail was observed in a flock of c400 Yellow Wagtails *Motacilla flava* dominated by subspecies *beema* and *lutea*. Migrating Yellow Wagtails often stopped their flight to rest among grazing sheep in the steppe close to our observation point in the coastal plain close to the Caspian sea. The White-headed Yellow Wagtail then flew off and left the area with the other Yellow Wagtails presumably to continue their migration. This subspecies has not been previously recorded in Azerbaijan (Patrikeev 2004).

The White-headed Yellow Wagtail showed the typical whitish head pattern with very pale grey ear coverts, crown and nape (Plates 1–3). Missing dark loreal and eye stripes excluded extreme pale *beema* (Alström & Mild 2003). An aberrant Yellow Wagtail was excluded as the head pattern was typical for *leucocephala* and there was no hint in the plumage colour for albinism or leucism. According to Alström & Mild (2003) *leucocephala* shows whitish and broader wingbars, formed by the greater and median coverts. Our observed bird showed broad wingbars but with a yellowish hue. Also, the tibia should be mostly whitish feathered (Alström & Mild 2003) but the observed bird clearly showed yellow feathers on the tibia (Plates 1–3). Both characteristics could limit a



Plate 1. Lateral view of White-headed Yellow Wagtail *Motacilla flava leucocephala*, Caspian sea coast near Besh Barmag, Azerbaijan, 12 April 2012. © Michael Heiss



Plate 2 (top left). White-headed Yellow Wagtail *Motacilla flava leucocephala*, Caspian sea coast near Besh Barmag, Azerbaijan, 12 April 2012. © Michael Heiss

Plate 3 (top right). White-headed Yellow Wagtail *Motacilla flava leucocephala*, Caspian sea coast near Besh Barmag, Azerbaijan, 12 April 2012. © Michael Heiss

Plate 4 (bottom). A White-headed Yellow Wagtail *Motacilla flava leucocephala* from the breeding grounds, Khar Us Nuur, Khovd province, Mongolia, 1 June 2012. It looks identical to the Azerbaijan record. © Andreas Buchheim & Lutz von der Heyde



Plate 5. Note the yellowish feathered tibia from the same individual as in Plate 4, Khar Us Nuur, Khovd province, Mongolia, 1 June 2012. © Andreas Buchheim & Lutz von der Heyde

secure identification. Plates 4–5 show a White-headed Yellow Wagtail from the Mongolian breeding grounds, which is virtually not distinguishable from our observed bird showing the same head pattern, wingbars and yellow ‘trousers’. Specimens in the collection of the Mongolian Academy of Sciences, Ulaanbaatar, showed either whitish or yellowish feathered tibia (A Buchheim pers comm). The observed bird from Azerbaijan is clearly within the normal range of plumage variation of *leucocephala*.

White-headed Yellow Wagtails breed in northwest Mongolia and adjacent regions (Alström & Mild 2003) and have occurred in the Middle East (Shirihai 1996, Porter & Aspinall 2010). The first record for Turkey was in 2011 (Kirwan *et al* 2014). Our White-headed Yellow Wagtail is well within the range of the taxon’s vagrant distribution. A Yellow Wagtail identified as *leucocephala* was found 350 km northeast of our observation point at Fetisovo plateau in Kazakhstan (Le Nevé *et al* 2010) but the photo of it clearly shows a dark loreal and eye stripe making a secure identification arguable.

Alström & Mild (2003) suggested that vagrant Yellow Wagtails of any subspecies should be considered with caution, due to head pattern variability especially intergrades between two subspecies which may look like other subspecies. Yellow Wagtails with white heads have been found breeding in northwestern France within the intergradation zone of *flava/flavissima* and are expected to be hybrids between both (Dubois 2001 in Alström & Mild 2003). However, the observed bird looked identical to those from the Mongolian breeding population and was therefore regarded as from that region.

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Corrigendum

Eldar A Rustamov. 2015. An annotated checklist of the birds of Turkmenistan. *Sandgrouse* 37: 28–56.

The author inadvertently omitted the species entry for Barred Warbler, which reads:

Barred Warbler *Sylvia nisoria*. Uncommon passage migrant preferring valleys and oases in mountains and plains. Spring migration April, autumn August to September.

This should be inserted before **Orphean Warbler** *Sylvia hortensis* and after **Desert Warbler** *Sylvia nana* (p49).