

WESTERN YELLOW WAGTAIL

Photographic record of leucistic *Motacilla flava* from Porbandar, Gujarat



IUCN Red List:
Global: Least
Concern (Birdlife
International 2017)

Aberrantly coloured Western Yellow Wagtail (Photo: Dhaval Vargiya)

Aves
[Class of Birds]

Passeriformes
[Order of perching birds]

Motacillidae
[Family of Pipits and
Wagtails]

Motacilla flava
[Western Yellow Wagtail]

Species described by
Linnaeus in 1758

The sighting of Leucistic Western yellow wagtail *Motacilla flava* at Karly II Wetland (21.632030°N & 69.650875°E) of Mokarsagar Wetland Complex of Porbandar District, Gujarat, on 22 March 2015, is probably the first known published record of leucism in Western Yellow Wagtail from India. Records of colour aberrations in Indian birds between 1886–2015 have been already published but do not include Wagtail sp. (Mahabal et al. 2016).

Western Yellow Wagtail is a common winter visitor to Gujarat and seen in suitable habitats across the state (Ganpule 2016). Head, nape and ear-coverts are dark slate-grey, sometimes with a trace of a white supercilium. Back is olive and wings brown with two yellowish bars. Tail is dark brown with white outer edge.

The bird is bright yellow from chin to under tail-coverts. Winter plumage is duller, with the grey on head mixed with olive. Sexes are more or less alike. Western yellow wagtail affects pastures and moist grassy ground especially along riversides and on jheel margins (Ali & Ripley 1971).

Mokarsagar Wetland complex is a group of wetlands including Kuchhadi, Subhashnagar, Zavar, Karly I, Karly II, Vanana, Dharampur, Gosabara, and Mokarsagar Wetlands of Porbandar district of Gujarat State, India. The huge area of more than 10,000ha, the source of freshwater for many farmers and villagers, is really a lifeline for people and wetland dependent biodiversity including birds, reptiles, insects and mammals.

On the afternoon of 22 March 2015, author spotted one leucistic wagtail at 16:18hr and observed the bird for 30 minutes: feeding, bathing and preening. The bird was as active as other individuals of wagtails in the nearby shallow water habitat. Normal Western Yellow Wagtails were aware of the presence of this “odd” looking individual but none reacted.

Infact, a normal Western yellow wagtail appear pretty close while it was bathing

Aberrantly coloured birds are easy to spot and birders share many sightings on social media. Generally referred as “albino”, aberrantly colour birds can be described in seven separate aberration categories based on lack or excessive melalin deposition.

Global Distribution:

Native: Afghanistan; Albania; Algeria; Angola; Armenia; Austria; Azerbaijan; Bahrain; Bangladesh; Belarus; Belgium; Benin; Bhutan; Bosnia and Herzegovina; Botswana; Bulgaria; Burkina Faso; Burundi; Cameroon; Central African Republic; Chad; China; Congo; Congo, The Democratic Republic of the; Côte d'Ivoire; Croatia; Cyprus; Czech Republic; Denmark; Djibouti; Egypt; Equatorial Guinea; Eritrea; Estonia; Ethiopia; Finland; France; Gabon; Gambia; Georgia; Germany; Ghana; Gibraltar; Greece; Guinea; Guinea-Bissau; Hungary; India; Iran, Islamic Republic of; Iraq; Ireland; Israel; Italy; Jordan; Kazakhstan; Kenya; Kuwait; Kyrgyzstan; Latvia; Lebanon; Liberia; Libya; Liechtenstein; Lithuania; Luxembourg; Macedonia, the former Yugoslav Republic of; Malawi; Mali; Malta; Mauritania; Moldova; Monaco; Mongolia; Montenegro; Morocco; Mozambique; Namibia; Nepal; Netherlands; Niger; Nigeria; Norway; Oman; Pakistan; Palau; Poland; Portugal; Qatar; Romania; Russian Federation (Central Asian Russia, Eastern Asian Russia, European Russia); Rwanda; San Marino; Saudi Arabia; Senegal; Serbia; Sierra Leone; Slovakia; Slovenia; Somalia; South Africa; South Sudan; Spain; Sri Lanka; Sudan; Swaziland; Sweden; Switzerland; Syrian Arab Republic; Tajikistan; Tanzania, United Republic of; Togo; Tunisia; Turkey; Turkmenistan; Uganda; Ukraine; United Arab Emirates; United Kingdom; Uzbekistan; Western Sahara; Yemen; Zambia; Zimbabwe

Vagrant: Cape Verde; Comoros; Faroe Islands; Iceland; Maldives; Seychelles; Svalbard and Jan Mayen



Aberrantly coloured with normal Western Yellow Wagtail
(Photo: Dhaval Vargiya)

Generally, overall colour of plumage is the result of biological pigments (mostly melanins and carotenoids), structural colour or a combination of the two (Mahabal et al. 2016).

As not completely white (partial albinism) with some yellow pigment and pinkish bill, it's recognized as leucistic individual. The vent was yellow in colour, which confirms it as Yellow Wagtail over Citrine Wagtail *Motacilla citreola*, White Wagtail *Motacilla alba* or White-browed Wagtail *Motacilla maderaspatensis*. Grey Wagtail *Motacilla cinerea* would have otherwise bright yellow vent, the tail would be longer and the overall body would also be slimmer (Grimmett et al. 2015).

This sighting is the first published report of colour aberration in Western yellow Wagtail from Indian subcontinent.

References

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