

confirm that it was indeed a Citrine Wagtail. It bore a superficial resemblance to a White Wagtail with a pale grey mantle, crown and rump. But it lacked the black marks found on the breast of the White Wagtail; instead the breast was washed with a buffish tinge. The two white wing bars and especially the white edges to the tertials were much more conspicuous than in the White Wagtail, and of course the call was quite distinct.

By now most of the birders on the isle had gathered and Will Russell, an American visitor, was able to show them the bird through his Questar x80 telescope. The bird was seen at a number of different localities on the isle over the next two days.

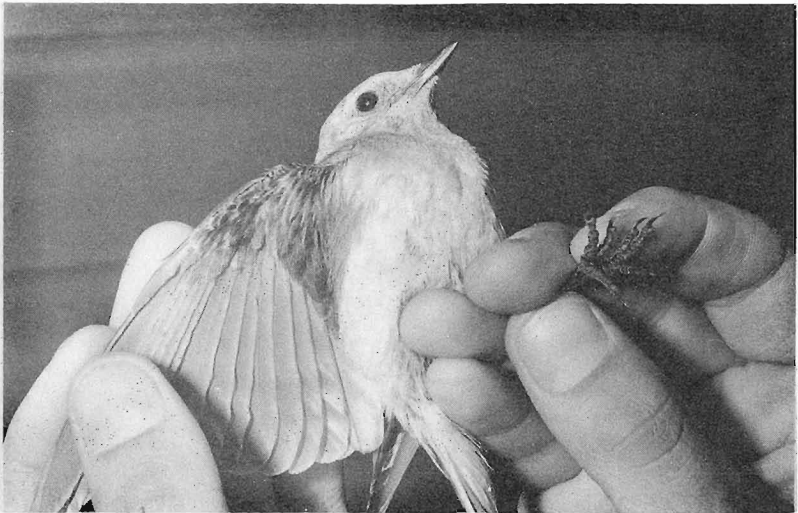
This was the 17th record of Citrine Wagtail for Fair Isle, and about the 25th for Britain of this Siberian vagrant.

Black-eared Wheatear on Fair Isle

At about 1800 on 18th June Dorian Buffery found a strange female wheatear in the catching box of the Double Dyke trap. I examined the bird in the Observatory and was unable to put a name to it though it appeared to be either a Black-eared, Pied or perhaps an Eastern Pied Wheatear. I took a full description, measurements and photographed the bird but from the information available to us we were still unable to identify it. I decided to release the bird and hoped that we would obtain views of it in the field which might help with the problem. However the bird flew off over the Brae O' Roskilie and was not seen again.

The next move was to contact the Royal Scottish Museum to see if we could obtain a series of skins of these difficult wheatears. Had the bird been a male, or even a female in fresh plumage or a juvenile we might have been able to identify it, but an adult female in worn plumage proved to be a very difficult case indeed.

A week or two later a cigar box containing skins of Black-eared, Pied and Eastern Pied Wheatears arrived from Robert McGowan at the R.S.M. We carefully unwrapped each skin and laid them out in the bird room. We were immediately able to rule out the Eastern Pied Wheatear *Oenanthe picata* which was a much darker, greyer bird than we had imagined. The choice was now between the eastern race of Black-eared and Pied Wheatear. The differences between these two species in worn female plumage were slight but the Pied Wheatear seemed to be too 'cold' on the upperparts and too white below. The specimens of Black-eared were much closer to our bird with more buffy mantles, and a peachy coloured wash on the breast. We decided that our bird was a female of the eastern race of Black-eared Wheatear *Oenanthe hispanica melanoleuca* which breeds in South-east Europe across to Iran. This is the fifth record of the species for Fair Isle, the others being a male of the western form on 25 September 1907, one seen on 8—13th November 1951, a female trapped on 19th May 1964 and a first-year bird trapped on 27th September 1964.



Female Black-eared Wheatear, 18th June 1979.