

## BirdLife Australia Rarities Committee

### Unusual Record Report Form

This form is intended to aid observers in the preparation of a submission to document a major rare bird in Australia. Its use is NOT mandatory. Please attach and/or include all relevant information including any digital images. Please Email the completed form/submission to the BARC Chair, Tony Palliser [tonyp@bigpond.net.au](mailto:tonyp@bigpond.net.au)

BARC considers submissions that include a minimum of the submitter's name(s), the bird species claimed and the location and date(s) of the record. However, more information and evidence will usually be required for BARC to accept a record. So, please submit as much detailed information about the bird as possible.

If you choose not to use this form please make sure all relevant information requested in this form is included in your submission. However, it is our preference that you fully complete sections "A" and "B", or follow their headings, so that BARC has some continuity between all submissions.

| Section A: Submitter details               |                                       |
|--|---------------------------------------|
| Your name(s)<br>Joint submissions are fine | Marc Gardner, Mike Eaton, Tom Tarrant |
| Your email, phone or address               |                                       |

| Section B: Record details  |   |
|--|---|
| Common and scientific names<br>Include subspecies if relevant  | Citrine Wagtail<br><i>Motacilla citreola citreola</i>   |
| Site location<br>(with GPS if possible)  | Katherine Wastewater Treatment Plant<br>Google maps: -14.5016782, 132.2323157   |
| Date(s) and time(s) of record<br>(First and last date of occurrence if known)  | First observed: Sunday 26 July 2020 at approximately 11:06am<br>Last observed: Tuesday 28 July 2020 at approximately 17:30pm  |
| How many individuals were there?   | 1 (one) bird  |
| What was the distance to the bird(s)?  | <15m at times   |
| Habitat description  | Concrete sides to wastewater treatment ponds. Occasionally would frequent trees in the riparian area between the ponds and the adjacent Katherine River. Tree species here included <i>Eucalyptus camaldulensis</i> (River Red Gum). Did not observe the bird along the actual Katherine River (waterway), only at the treatment ponds.   |
| Sighting conditions<br>(e.g. weather, visibility, light conditions)  | Weather during most observations was fine, clear, moderately gusty winds and warm temperature 27-32 degrees Celsius.  |
| How confident are you in the identification<br>(as a %) and why?   | 100% - photographed well.   |
| Did you find and/or identify the bird initially? Who else recorded the bird and do they agree with the identification? | Marc (driving) was with Tom and Mike around the ponds and Mike yelled out that he saw a wagtail. Tom also mentioned he saw it fly off. Marc stated that Yellow Wagtails can sometimes be found at this location from August to about March. We continued around the ponds and went back to visit the site again in case it was a Yellow Wagtail and to our surprise we did locate the bird again and immediately identified it as a wagtail species. Tom confirmed it was a Citrine Wagtail and we all slowly got out of the car to take photos of it.<br><br>On the afternoon of the 26 June, Marc accompanied other birders from Darwin to the site (Peter Kyne, Magen Pettit and Christy Davies) |

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|   | <p>where the bird was subsequently located again and photographed further.</p> <p>Over the next several days, many birdwatchers from Katherine, Darwin and interstate (who were lucky to be close at the time) also managed to observe the wagtail, take photos and record its presence/behaviour.</p>   |
| What experience have you had with this species?   | <p>Marc – none with this species, but has with other Wagtail species in Australia and overseas.</p> <p>Mike – none, but has with other Wagtail species in Australia and overseas.</p> <p>Tom – lots of experience with this species, but not in Australia (Tom’s first Citrine Wagtail in Australia). Lots of experience with other wagtail species in Australia and overseas.</p>   |
| Has this species been seen at this location before? When?   | Never, first record for the Northern Territory as well. There is an unconfirmed (not accepted - BARC submission #92) of a Citrine Wagtail from South Alligator River (Kakadu NP) on 27/12/1981.  |
| Have photographs of the bird or discussion of it occurred on the internet? (Please provide the site name, a summary, electronic link, etc.) | <p>Yes, Marc immediately posted a photo on Australian Twitcher’s Facebook page (the Facebook page most discussion of this sort of record occurs). Link is:<br/> <a href="https://www.facebook.com/groups/718576241555767/">https://www.facebook.com/groups/718576241555767/</a></p> <p>The photograph of the bird taken on the Sunday when it was first seen was actually put as the group’s banner bird (see link above).</p> <p>Other photos were posted on eBird checklists over the days that it was observed by the authors and others.</p> |
| Do you permit BARC to display your images etc. electronically (credited with your name)   | Yes  |

You may choose to delete or ignore this page, but please include as much of the requested information in your submission as possible, especially Sections C and E.

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| <b>Section C: Supporting evidence</b>   |  |
| Please include evidence that supports the identification, such as photographs, video, call recordings, etc. Digital images can be pasted into this document below, at the end, or provided separately. Digital video and sound recordings can be sent separately to this form. Label photos etc or insert captions to make note of relevant features they show. |  |
| Photos: attached.   |  |
| Bird heard calling, but no recordings made.   |  |
| Video: attached.  |  |

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| <b>Section D: Description of the bird(s)</b>  |  |
| Please provide a description of the bird(s) including all identification features recorded. Provide all possible details that might corroborate the identification. |  |
| Plumage   | <p>Head: clear lemon yellow colour with partial grey crown that extends to grey on the back of the head</p> <p>Back: slate/dark grey</p> <p>Wings: Lesser coverts slate/dark grey, median wing coverts white (“white wing bar”) which appeared worn, greater secondary coverts were dark grey/brownish with an edge appearing white (“second white wing bar”). Primaries and secondaries appeared to be also be dark grey to brownish depending on angle of the light.</p> |

|                                 |  |
|---------------------------------|--|
|                                 | <p>Tail: Dark grey above, outer retrices appear white above and below. Rump and upper tail coverts were dark grey.</p> <p>Undertail coverts: White</p> <p>Belly and vent: dirty lemon yellowish colour with some grey plumage.</p> <p>Breast/throat: similar to belly and vent with lemon colour with some grey plumage. Dark grey, almost black plumage at sides of breast joining dark collar at back of neck.</p> <p>Flanks/leg coverts: light grey.</p>  |
| <b>Bare parts</b>               | <p>Eyes: Dark, black.</p> <p>Bill: Typical wagtail, short, pointed, dark grey in colour</p> <p>Legs/Feet: Three toes forward, one hind toe. Dark grey coloured legs, feet and toenails.</p>  |
| <b>Moult details</b>            | <p>Unsure of moult details, however on close inspection of some photos, wing feathers show some wear.</p>  |
| <b>Structure and 'jizz'</b>     | <p>Typical wagtail type structure and jizz.</p>  |
| <b>Calls</b>                    | <p>Only heard calling three times, otherwise generally silent. When flushed on subsequent observation during the afternoon on the 26 June 2020 – it flew uttering a typical tseep tseep call, as described in texts.</p>   |
| <b>Behaviours</b>               | <p>First observed flying away by Mike Eaton, then subsequently observed foraging along edge of pond that had green algal scum. During subsequent observations by all who observed it, the Katherine Citrine Wagtail would walk along picking at food items that could not be identified (possibly small insects) of the same pond. When approached, the bird either flew further along pond or across pond to shelter at a covered pump station where it would 'disappear' amongst infrastructure. During subsequent observations it would occasionally resort to flying along the pond fence line, over the fence and into bushland between the ponds and the adjacent Katherine River.</p>   |
| <b>Age, sex and/or taxonomy</b> | <p>Unknown exact age, sub-adult plumage.</p> <p>Determined to be adult first summer male of <i>M. c. citreola</i> subspecies. The bird was observed in July, during Northern Hemisphere mid-summer (Southern Hemisphere mid-winter). This is based on the bird looking like an adult summer male but retaining some grey juvenile plumage on the crown, face, sides of breast, flanks and belly, and not yet fully developed 'citrine' colour yellow throughout these areas (Alstrom, Mild, &amp; Zetterstrom 2003). Also determined not to be a first year juvenile or female Citrine Wagtail due to clear yellow face and the lack of grey around the ear coverts and lores.</p> <p>The Citrine Wagtail observed was also separated from subspecies <i>calcarata</i> which tends to have a darker grey/almost black back and whiter wing plumage than the Katherine bird. In addition to this it was separated from the subspecies <i>citreola</i> 'werae' by having a more extensive 'thick' dark-grey collar leading to the upper sides of breast area (Alstrom, Mild, &amp; Zetterstrom 2003; Higgins, Peter &amp; Cowling 2006).</p> |

### Section E: Confusion species

Please indicate other species that the bird(s) might be confused with and how they can be eliminated

**Eastern Yellow Wagtail (*Motacilla tschutschensis*):** Eastern Yellow Wagtail are found frequenting the Katherine Wastewater Treatment Ponds during most summers with at least two subspecies being documented and photographed in recent years (*M. t. tschutschensis* and *M. t. macronyx*). The Katherine Citrine Wagtail was easily distinguished from all Eastern Yellow Wagtails primarily by its relatively clear yellow face and lores, compared to a typical grey face with a white supercilium on many Eastern Yellow Wagtail subspecies. In addition to this was the grey on the crown leading to a dark grey/black collar on the Katherine bird, as well as a dark grey rump. Eastern Yellow Wagtails tend to have a lighter grey rump or olive rump, and slightly shorter tail than that observed on the Katherine Citrine Wagtail. The Katherine Citrine Wagtail also appeared 'larger' than any Eastern Yellow Wagtail observed at the pond previously.

**Western Yellow Wagtail (*Motacilla flava*):** Western Yellow Wagtail, particularly subspecies *M. f. lutea* and *M. f. flavissima* could also be confused, as both subspecies also have a yellow face and lores, and superficially look similar to *M. citreola* (Alstrom, Mild, & Zetterstrom 2003). Again, the Katherine Citrine Wagtail is easily distinguished from this species by grey on the crown, dark grey/black collar and sides to the breast, grey back and mantle and more extensive and broader white wing bars and edges to tertials compared to no collar and a usually greenish crown and back and less extensive white wing bars in *M. flava*. Western Yellow Wagtail have never been recorded in Australia or its Territories.

**Grey Wagtail (*Motacilla cinerea*):** Grey Wagtails are occasional visitors to the Northern Territory with the most recent observations occurring near Katherine of two birds at Edith Falls (Nitmiluk National Park) in early 2019. The Katherine Citrine Wagtail differed by having a clear yellow face compared to a grey face with a white supercilium, grey legs compared to pinkish legs of a Grey Wagtail, in addition to a dark grey coloured rump compared to a yellow rump of a Grey Wagtail.

## Section F: References and aids

Did you use books, journal articles or on-line sites or pages to help you prepare this submission? Which ones?

BARC Cases No. 92, 597, 855 & 1047.

<https://birdlifephotography.org.au/index.php/show-image?id=33294%3ACitrine+Wagtail> (Accessed 20<sup>th</sup> August 2020)

Alstrom, P., Mild, K. & Zetterstrom, B. (2003). *Pipits & Wagtails of Europe, Asia and North America*. Christopher Helm, London.

BirdLife International (2020) Species factsheet: *Motacilla citreola*. Downloaded from <http://www.birdlife.org> on 03/08/2020.

Boonsong, L. & Round, P.D. (2005) *A guide to the Birds of Thailand*, Saha Karn Bhaet Group, Bangkok, Thailand.

Menkhorst, P., Rogers, D., Clarke, R., Davies, J., Marsack, P. & Franklin, K. (2017), *The Australian Bird Guide*, CSIRO, Victoria, Australia

Higgins, P.J., Peter, J.M. & Cowling, S.J. (Eds) (2006). *Handbook Australian, New Zealand and Antarctic Birds*. Vol. 7: Boatbill to Starlings (Part B: Dunnock to Starlings). Oxford University Press, Melbourne.

McGill, A.R. (1963). 'A Record of the Yellow-headed Wagtail for Australia', *Emu* 63: 66-71.

Robson, C. (2008). *Field Guide to the Birds of Thailand and South East Asia*. New Holland Publisher, London.

Svenson, L., Mullarney, K. and Zetterstrom, D. (2011) *Collins Bird Guide: The most complete guide to the birds of Britain and Europe*, Harper Collins, London UK.

Viney, C., Phillips, K. & Ying, L.C. (2005) *The Birds of Hong Kong and South China*, Hong Kong Special Administrative Region Government, Hong Kong, China.

Would you like to acknowledge the assistance of others in the identification process or preparation of this submission?

Marc Gardner acknowledges Mike Eaton for initially spotting the bird, the first Citrine Wagtail record for the Northern Territory, and Tom Tarrant who identified it as a Citrine Wagtail.

**Photos (photos by M Gardner 2020):**



*Figure 1: Citrine Wagtail, Katherine Wastewater Treatment Plant, Katherine, Northern Territory, 26 July 2020*



*Figure 2: Citrine Wagtail, Katherine Wastewater Treatment Plant, Katherine, Northern Territory, 26 July 2020*



*Figure 3: Citrine Wagtail with unidentified food item, Katherine Wastewater Treatment Plant, Katherine, Northern Territory, 26 July 2020*



*Figure 4: Citrine Wagtail, front, Katherine Wastewater Treatment Plant, Katherine, Northern Territory, 26 July 2020*



*Figure 5: Citrine Wagtail showing side and undertail, Katherine Wastewater Treatment Plant, Katherine, Northern Territory, 26 July 2020*