

BirdLife Australia Rarities Committee

Unusual Record Report Form

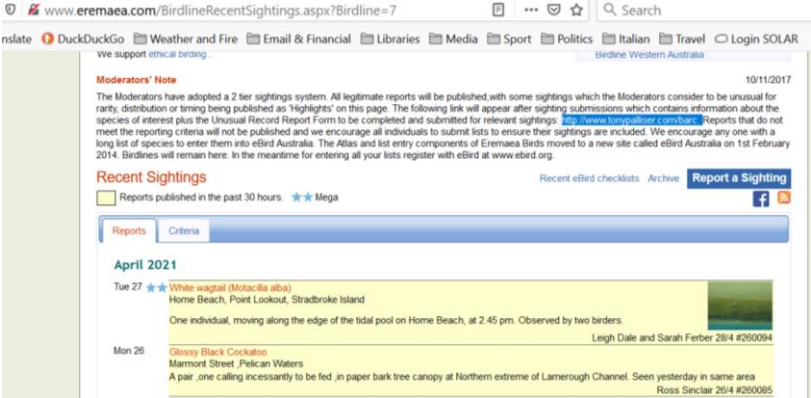
This form is intended to aid observers in the preparation of a submission to document a major rare bird in Australia. Its use is NOT mandatory. Please attach and/or include all relevant information including any digital images. Please email the completed form/submission to the BARC Chair, Tony Palliser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

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) Joint submissions are fine	Sarah Ferber (original sighting and identification), Leigh Dale (photos), and Graham Barwell (identification; photo captions and editing of submission).
Your email, phone or address	Contact person: leighdale@protonmail.com

Section B: Record details	
Common and scientific names Include subspecies if relevant	White Wagtail <i>Motacilla alba</i> , probably imm. <i>leucopsis</i> 'Amur Wagtail'
Site location (with GPS if possible)	Home Beach* (incorrectly identified on Google maps as 'Cylinder Beach'), North Stradbroke Island, Queensland approximately 27° 25' 28.18" S, 153° 31' 15.04" (sites varied)
Date(s) and time(s) of record (First and last date of occurrence if known)	14.44 until 14.49 on 27 April 2021 (outer range of photograph times). The bird was on both seaward and landward sides of the pools at various times, generally within 1-2 metres of the edge. 15.26 to 16.15 on 28 April 2021 (outer range of photograph times). The bird was not sighted the following day, nor the day after.
How many individuals were there?	1
What was the distance to the bird(s)?	c. 30 metres (day one); c. 40-50 metres (day two).
Habitat description	Tidal / freshwater pools on beach
Sighting conditions (e.g. weather, visibility, light conditions)	On 27 April the bird was seen in very bright sunshine. On 28 April, light to medium cloud meant the beach was in shadow; although the bird was still easily visible, photography was more difficult.
How confident are you in the identification (as a %) and why?	We are fully confident: after Ferber's initial checks of Morecombe and Stewart's <i>eGuide</i> , identification was confirmed by Graham Barwell on the morning of 28 April; it was confirmed by experienced birdwatchers who arrived on North Stradbroke Island on the afternoon of that day, and by Dawn Muir, Birds Queensland, leader of Ferber & Dale's birdwatching group. The identifications are supported by general and academic references.
Did you find and/or identify the bird initially? Who else recorded the bird and do they agree with the identification?	Having gone birdwatching on the beach on the afternoon of 27 April 2021, Ferber checked the <i>Michael Morecombe & David Stewart eGuide to Australian Birds</i> to confirm that an Australian sighting had been recorded. Dale also recognised the bird from her photos taken in Kaziranga National Park, Assam, in January 2019. At that time, the species had been identified using Grimmett et al.'s <i>Birds of the Indian Subcontinent</i> .

	<p>We cross-checked the photographs had taken that afternoon (see Photos 1–6; a further 8 photos were taken) against the material in Morecombe and Stewart’s <i>eGuide</i>, and with Dale’s photos taken in Kaziranga.</p> <p>We do not use social media and therefore aren’t aware of photos/sightings of this individual, other than those listed on e-bird. For these sightings, made on 28 April 2021, most of the people posting reported the location as Cylinder Beach, Redland [as per Google Maps]; Daly, correctly, describes it as Home Beach, North Stradbroke Island [as per Apple Maps]. [Cylinder Beach is east of Home Beach, separated from it by the headland in the background of Photo 8; for clarification, the most obvious landmark on the headland that separates the two beaches is the Stradbroke Island Beach Hotel].</p> <p>Poster from 28 April 2021 on eBird for Home Beach, North Stradbroke is Gus Daly. Posters from 28 April 2021 on eBird for Cylinder Beach, Redland, are Louis Backstrom, Elliot Leach, Stephen Murray and Ged Tranter: https://ebird.org/media/catalog?taxonCode=whiwag&view=List&yr=YCUSTOM&mediaType=p&sort=rating_rank_desc&regionCode=AU-QLD&by=1999&q=White%20Wagtail</p>
<p>What experience have you had with this species?</p>	<p>Sighted and photographed in Kaziranga National Park, Assam, India in January 2019.</p>
<p>Has this species been seen at this location before? When?</p>	<p>To our knowledge this is the first sighting on North Stradbroke Island. There was a sighting at the northern end of Eastern Beach on nearby Moreton Island on 3 May 2014 by Melinda Laidlaw/Terry Reis as per e-bird (https://ebird.org/checklist/S19322781).</p>
<p>Have photographs of the bird or discussion of it occurred on the internet? (Please provide the site name, a summary, electronic link, etc.)</p>	<p>Barwell advised Ferber and Dale to post their sighting to Birdline Central and Southern Queensland: http://www.ereamae.com/BirdlineRecentSightings.aspx?Birdline=7&BirdlineShowHighlights=0</p>  <p>This posting was subsequently reposted to the Australian Twitchers Facebook site.</p>
<p>Do you permit BARC to display your images etc. electronically (credited with your name)</p>	<p>Yes.</p>

Section C: Supporting evidence

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.

Over the page are seven photos of *M. a. leucopsis*, the first six taken on the first day of sighting (27 April), the seventh on the second day (28 April). The latter is included to show scale. The final one is a ‘location shot’, the headland in the background demarcating Home Beach (the site at which the bird was seen) from Cylinder Beach.

All photos were taken with a handheld Olympus OMD E-M10 with Leica 100–400 zoom lens. From memory, the camera’s 2x digital teleconverter was engaged. Ferber was using Leica 10x25 binoculars; Dale, Swarovski CL 10x25.

Photo 1 (below): taken on 27 April @ 14.49

Shutter speed 1/800, aperture f6.3, lens @ 400 zoom, ISO200; cropped and enlarged (in proportion).

Note the sooty crown, grey-black mantle & back, generally white wing coverts, black white-edged tail.



Photo 2 (below): taken on 27 April at 14.47.

Shutter speed 1/1000, aperture f7.1, ISO 200, 400mm zoom; cropped and enlarged (in proportion).

Note the white forecrown, face and throat, grey-black mantle and back, and generally white wing coverts.



Photo 3 (below): taken on 27 April at 14.45

Shutter speed 1/640, aperture f10, ISO 200, 400mm zoom; cropped and enlarged in proportion

Note the white lower face and throat, and the small black triangular breast patch that is clearly differentiated.



Photo 4 (right):
taken on 27 April at
14.45

Shutter speed 1/640,
aperture f10, ISO 200,
400mm zoom; cropped
and enlarged in
proportion

Note the white throat
and black bib; the white
on the wing coverts;
the white belly, flank and
undertail coverts.



Photo 5 (below):
taken on 27 April at 14.47
Shutter speed 1/1000, aperture f7.1, ISO 200, 400mm zoom; cropped and enlarged in proportion
Note the sooty black cap to the nape, grey-black mantle and back; white vent, and black wingtips.



Photo 6 (below):
taken on 27 April at 14.46
Shutter speed 1/1000, aperture f7.1, ISO 200, 400mm zoom; cropped and enlarged in proportion
Note the black tail and upper tail coverts.



Photo 7 (below): taken on 28 April at 15.26
Shutter speed 1/800 f6.3, ISO200, 400 zoom; cropped and enlarged in proportion; lightened.

Note the Willie Wagtail in foreground



Photo 8 (below): General Location

Tidal / freshwater pools on Home Beach. This photo was taken on 8 May, looking east towards Point Lookout. Although it was two weeks after, the pools are essentially in the same position but were clearer and slightly more extensive at the time of the sightings of the Amur Wagtail. The two yellow arrows on the left indicate the approximate position of the bird when photographed on 27 April, the yellow arrow on the right the approximate position on 28 April. The orange arrow shows the headland that separates Home Beach from Cylinder (see p. 2, this document).



Section D: Description of the bird(s)

Please provide a description of the bird(s) including all identification features recorded.
Provide all possible details that might corroborate the identification.

Plumage	<p>The small bird, fractionally smaller than the Willie Wagtail, was largely black and white, with dark grey and grey-black on back and mantle, and black on the lower parts of the wings and the top of the tail.</p> <p>The bird had a sooty to black ‘cap’ extending down to the nape, above a distinctive white area on the side of the head extending from the gape to the ear coverts above and below the eye. This encirclement helped to highlight the black eye. The underside of the bird was white from throat to vent, with the exception of a small triangular black ‘bib’ pointing downwards from the throat to the chest (Photo 3). The mantle, back and rump were dark grey, tending towards a dark brown towards the wing, including the tertials, primaries and secondaries, with some white streaking visible on the primaries and secondaries. There was a distinctive slab of white, extending from the bend of the wing, on the wing coverts. The top of the tail was black, the underparts white, with a white edge to the black.</p> <p>In regard to moult, Blasco-Zumeta and Heinze have observed that from February to April both adults and juveniles ‘have a pre-breeding moult acquiring the breeding plumage, changing a variable number of median coverts, inner greater covers, tertials and tail feathers’ (Abstract). Photographs on e-bird show immature birds and juveniles as paler, although Carter <i>et al.</i> note that of two vagrants observed in Victoria in 1992, one <i>baicalensis</i> the other <i>leucopsis</i>, one ‘was moulting on a revised timetable now in phase with the austral rather than boreal seasons’ (Abstract). None of the photographs, however, suggest that the bird was in moult: colours were solid and clearly demarcated, and feathers looked settled rather than ruffed or fluffy. A photo of the bird in flight, posted to eBird by Gus Daly, shows no sign of moult in the wing feathers:</p> <p>https://ebird.org/media/catalog?taxonCode=whiwag8&view=List&yr=YCUSTOM&q=White%20Wagtail%20(Chinese)%20-%20Motacilla%20alba%20leucopsis</p>
Bare parts	The bill was dark grey to black; the legs dark grey.
Moult details	No visible moulting.
Structure and ‘jizz’	<p>The perky tail, the jaunty movement, the distinct highlighting of the black eye encircled by white, and the ‘black neckerchief’ on the chest allowed us immediately to distinguish <i>Motacilla alba</i> from two other small black and white birds on Home Beach on 27 April: the Willie Wagtail (only slightly larger, with a similar shape), and the Red-capped Plover (slightly similar shape and movement, but a stumpy tail). During Ferber and Dale’s observations, the tail of the Amur Wagtail varied in position from fully erect (Photo 1), to partially erect (Photo 2), to parallel with the back of the Bird (Photos 4 and 7).</p>
Calls	We did not hear any calls.
Behaviours	<p>The Amur Wagtail seemed ‘perky’ (but not nervous), in good condition, and while not sociable with other birds did not seem especially wary of them nor of human beings. Nevertheless, because Home Beach is used by people who walk their dogs, it was occasionally disturbed by walkers and dogs that were (legally) off leash. (Because of concerned about this disruption, Ferber and Dale noted on the e-bird posting that the bird was easily disturbed.)</p> <p>The bird trotted along the edges of the pools, pausing frequently, seeming to feed by dipping its beak towards the sand. It moved into the very shallow part of the water (see Photo 1) on odd occasions but seemed more often to be within .5 to 1.5 metres from the edge of the pools. The observations of positioning and behaviour are consistent with those Ferber & Dale made in Kaziranga, where the bird was nearby water while feeding in short grass, and with the description of behaviour of a European subspecies of <i>M. alba</i> feeding on insects washed up on the banks of rivers (Davies and Houston 157). All White Wagtails recorded in Australia to date have been migratory. Slater asserts that the bird can appear from September to April (p. 382); Menkhorst <i>et al.</i> give April-May (504).</p>
Age, sex and/or taxonomy	<p>On the basis of the photographs, Graham Barwell and Dawn Muir advised independently (via email) that the bird was likely to be an immature <i>leucopsis</i>. The relatively clean and consistent lines of demarcation between colouring, the white in the wing coverlets, the size and positioning of the bib as per the illustration in Pizzey and Knight (486), the greyness in the back and, above all, the lack of any black across or near the eye, suggest that <i>M. a. leucopsis</i> (‘Amur Wagtail’) is the correct identification. This is supported by the illustrations in Menkhorst <i>et al.</i> (505), who offer ‘<i>clear white face combined with black upperparts diagnostic in our region</i>’ (their emphasis).</p>

Section E: Confusion species

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

There is no obvious confusion species. The plumage pattern is unlike that of any Australian bird of roughly similar size which is black and white, e.g., Magpie-lark or Willie Wagtail, both of which were present on the beach on the first day of sighting and both of which were easily distinguishable from the Amur Wagtail. The black and white plumage separates this individual from other migratory wagtails and pipits likely to occur in Australia, and the plumage pattern separates it from Forest Wagtail. The lack of a black line through the eye rules out the Black-backed wagtail (*Motacilla lugens*). The wings and back, along with the relatively short 'bib', of the bird observed at Stradbroke Island *could* seem consistent with the illustration of *baicalensis* in Slater, but Slater also asserts that backs across the subspecies can 'vary from grey to black' (382). The dark grey back and mantle colour combined with the generally white wing coverts and the bib not extending into the white throat help separate *leucopsis* from *baicalensis*.

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?

Blasco-Zumeta, Javier, and Gerd-Michael Heinz. 'Motacilla alba. White Wagtail. Lavandera blanca.' *Identification Atlas of Aragon's Birds*. <http://blascozumeta.com/wp-content/uploads/imprimible/835.motacilla-alba.pdf>

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Carter, Mike, Robert Farnes and Neville Pamment. 1995. 'White Wagtails "Motacilla alba" in Victoria.' *Australian Bird Watcher*, vol. 16, no. 1, pp. 21–33. Revised 2020.

Davies, N.B., and A.I. Houston. 1981. 'Owners and Satellites: The Economics of Territory Defence in the Pied Wagtail, *Motacilla Alba*.' *Journal of Animal Ecology*, vol. 50, pp. 157–80.

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Grimmett, Richard, Carol Inskipp and Tim Inskipp. 2016. *Birds of the Indian Subcontinent*. Indian edn. Helm Field Guides. Bloomsbury: Christopher Helm.

Lee, Ji-Yung, Jin-Young Park, Incheol Kim, Woo-Yuel Kim and Ha-Cheol Sung. 2018. 'Breeding biology of two wagtail subspecies on Ulleung Island, Korea: Amur Wagtails, *Motacilla alba leucopsis* and Black-backed Wagtails, *M. a. lugens*.' *Animal Cells and Systems*, vol. 22, no. 4, pp. 259–66.

Menkhorst, Peter, Danny Rogers, Rohan Clarke, Jeff Davies, Peter Marsack and Kim Franklin. *The Australian Bird Guide*. Clayton South: CSIRO Publishing, 2017.

Morecombe, Michael, and David Stewart. *The Michael Morecombe and David Stewart eGuide to Australian Birds 5.1*.

Pizzey, Graham, and Frank Knight. 2001. *Field Guide to the Birds of Australia*. Sydney: Angus&Robertson/HarperCollins (printed 2002).

Simpson, Ken, and Nicolas Day. 1986. *The Birds of Australia*. 2nd edn. South Yarra: Lloyd O'Neil.

Slater, Peter, Pat Slater and Raoul Slater. 2009. *The Slater Field Guide to Australian Birds, Second Edition*. Sydney: Reed New Holland.

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

For advice and encouragement in making this submission, the authors would like to thank Gus Daly, Dawn Muir, Tony Palliser and Andrew Silcocks.

For advice in the identification of the White Wagtail, Leigh Dale and Sarah Ferber would like to thank Graham Barwell and Dawn Muir; they would also like to thank Professor Nandana Dutta, for the trip to Kaziranga National Park in January 2019 that enabled us to recognise *Motacilla alba* a long way from home.