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Nadia Yousuf

*Bioresource Research Centre, Islamabad, Pakistan*

Kainaat William

*Bioresource Research Centre, Islamabad, Pakistan*

Madeeha Manzoor

*Bioresource Research Centre, Islamabad, Pakistan, madeemanzoor@hotmail.com*

Balqees Khanum

*Bioresource Research Centre, Islamabad, Pakistan*

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## Short Report: Description and Distribution of Wagtails "Family *Motacillidae*" with Reference to Pakistan

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**SHORT REPORT: DESCRIPTION AND DISTRIBUTION OF WAGTAILS  
“FAMILY MOTACILLIDAE” WITH REFERENCE TO PAKISTAN**

**Nadia Yousuf, Kainaat William, Madeeha Manzoor\*, Balqees Khanum**

Bioresource Research Centre, 34-Bazar Road G-6/4 Islamabad

\*Email: [madeemanzoor@hotmail.com](mailto:madeemanzoor@hotmail.com)

**ABSTRACT**

In the current study, Wagtails of the Family *Motacillidae* were studied in Pakistan. Thirteen species and sub-species were found in different regions. Their characteristics were observed, photographs were taken, previous distributions of these species were analyzed, and a new distribution of each species was reported in this study. During study, the scavenging role of these birds was identified, and it was hoped that wagtails may play an important role in the absence of the vultures after recent downfalls in major scavengers. However, these important effects were not observed in the wagtails, and probably will not occur until their populations increase considerably.

**Keywords:**

**INTRODUCTION**

Wagtails belong to family *Motacillidae*, including small ground-dwelling birds. They are of small and slender build with long tails, and repeatedly wag their tail up and down. They have bounding flight, a quick gait and a rather jerky run. They are gregarious in their habitat after breeding season. Wagtails are insectivorous birds but also feed on seeds, worms, small molluscs and crustaceans. They are mainly small ground nesters and line their nests with hairs and feathers. They are found near running water on riverbanks and in moist grassland, however, wagtail *Dendronanthus indicus*, is restricted to forest on its breeding grounds (Heinzel, *et al.*, 1979).

**MATERIALS AND METHODS**

The current study was conducted to identify wagtails. For this purpose, the total study area was divided into several zones and each zone was then selected for the identification and observation of certain specific species. During this research, different strategies, i.e. time of sampling, areas of sampling, or sight of sampling were then decided on in each zone for different expected species basis, e.g. diurnal activities.

The study area was visited for bird watching, and among other birds, thirteen different species and subspecies of wagtails of the family *Motacillidae* were studied. After spotting the bird/birds in their locality at an approximate distance without disturbing them, the observations were made with the naked eye, field binoculars and a spotting scope and the information was recorded as field notes. The key features of relevant species on the parameters of

identification were suggested by Ali and Ripley (1973) and Roberts (1991) and were followed during the study. After making careful sight identification of the wagtails, photographs were taken by utilizing digital cameras and locals were interviewed about the possible distribution of species within the vicinity. Confirmed reliable data was collected. Distribution of each species was then compared to the literature suspecting its previous distribution.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The current study has been instituted to study the description and new distribution of the wagtail species in Pakistan. During the study, wagtail distribution has been reconfirmed in different areas of Pakistan as suggested by the previous literature, in addition to its distribution in previously unreported areas. Results and discussions of the study are given below.

### *Motacilla flava thunbergi*

This species has been confirmed in New Mirpur, N.W.F.P (Peshawar), Quetta, Punjab (Murree foothills, Rawal Lake, Gujranwala, Jhang), North East Baluchistan, Central Baluchistan, and Sind (Thatta). It has been found in metropolitan areas of Rawalpindi and Islamabad, and previously not reported areas, while Roberts (1991) reported its existence in the Murree foothills and Rawal Lake.

### *Motacilla flava beema*

Its presence has been confirmed in N.W.F.P (Bannu, Kohat), Punjab (Rawalpindi, Rahim Yar Khan and Lahore), Northern Baluchistan and Sind

(Thatta, Bannu). It has been found in metropolitan areas of Rawalpindi and Islamabad, as well as previously unreported areas, whereas Pyhala (2001) confirmed its presence in the Northwest corner of Rawalpindi.

### *Motacilla flava melanogrisea*

It has been confirmed in Baluchistan (Chagai, Quetta, Makran coast), Sind, Punjab, North East Baluchistan and Central Baluchistan. It has been found in Potohar and Rawalpindi, and previously unreported areas, whilst Roberts (1991) reported its occurrence in the Punjab Salt range.

### *Motacilla flava leucocephala*

Its presence has been confirmed in Punjab (Potohar, Salt Range, Jhelum, Attock, Rawalpindi and Rawal Lake). It has been found in metropolitan areas of Rawalpindi and Islamabad, and previously unreported areas, while Ali and Ripley (1973) reported its presence in Rawalpindi and Roberts (1991) confirmed it at Rawal Lake.

### *Motacilla citreola citreola*

Its presence has been confirmed in New Mirpur, Punjab (Punjab foothills, Kohat, Rawal Lake, Lahore), Northern Baluchistan and Southern Sind. It has been found in metropolitan areas of Rawalpindi and Islamabad, Gujranwala and Katar Kahar, and previously unreported areas of its distribution, while Ali and Ripley (1973) reported its distribution in the Punjab foothills and Roberts (1991) confirmed its presence in Rawal Lake.

### *Motacilla citreola calcarata*

It has been confirmed in Baluchistan (Khushdil Khan, Zangi Nawar and Kalat), Kashmir, Chitral, Baltistan, the Kagan valley, Gilgit, Swat, Hazara, Northern Baluchistan, N.W.F.P and Sind (Indus plains, lakes and Jheels of Sind). It has been found in Skardu (Hussain abad, Khumba, Hargesa, Katpana), metropolitan areas of Rawalpindi and Islamabad, as well as previously unreported areas, while Roberts (1991) reported its distribution in Chitral, Gilgit, Swat and Hazara and Grewal, *et al.*, (2002) confirmed it in Northern Punjab.

***Motacilla citreola werae***

It has been confirmed in Kashmir, Gilgit, N.W.F.P (Kohat, Bannu), Punjab (Potohar and Salt ranges of Punjab, Sargodha) and Sind, Northern Baluchistan, Lower Sind. It has been found in Talagang, and previously unreported areas, while Roberts (1991) reported it in the Punjab Salt ranges.

***Motacilla alba alboides***

It has been confirmed in Gilgit, Kashmir, Northern Chitral, Baltistan, Baluchistan, and Islamabad to Gujranwala. It has been found in Skardu (Hussain Abad, Khumba, Hargesa, Katpana), N.W.F.P (Kund), metropolitan areas of Rawalpindi and Islamabad, and previously unreported areas, while Ali and Ripley (1973) reported it in Gilgit to Baltistan, Roberts (1991) reported it in Rawalpindi, Skardu and Baltistan and Grewal, *et al.*, (2002) confirmed its presence in Gilgit, Kashmir and Islamabad to Lahore.

***Motacilla alba personata***

It has been confirmed in Chitral, Gilgit, Kashmir, northern parts of Punjab, Central Punjab, South of Multan, N.W.F.P (Bannu, Kohat) and Sind. It has been found in Skardu (Hussain Abad, Khumba, Hargesa, Katpana), Hunza), N.W.F.P (Kund), metropolitan areas of Rawalpindi and Islamabad, and previously unreported areas, while Ali and Ripley (1973) reported it at Rawal Lake, Roberts (1991) reported it in Chitral, Gilgit, northern parts of Punjab, Punjab Salt Ranges, Bannu, Kohat and Grewal, *et al.*, (2002) confirmed its presence in Central Punjab.

***Motacilla alba dukhunensis***

It has been confirmed in, Gilgit, Chitral, Kashmir, N.W.F.P (Kohat, Chitral), Sind (Indus basin, Thatta), Northern Baluchistan. This species has been found in New Mirpur, Cherat, Nizam Pur and Attock, as well as previously unreported areas, whilst Ali and Ripley (1973) reported it in Punjab, Roberts (1991) confirmed its existence in Gilgit, Chitral and Grewal, *et al.*, (2002) confirmed its occurrence in Central Punjab.

***Dendronanthus indicus***

It has been confirmed in Thatta. This species has been found in the Punjab river plains while Roberts (1991) confirmed its presence in Thatta.

***Motacilla maderaspatensis***

It has been confirmed in Punjab (Lahore, Kasur, lakes of Salt ranges, Potohar, Rawal Lake, Sialkot) and N.W.F.P (Thal and Kohat). This species has been found in Margallah Hills,

Hariipur, Abbotabad, Sargodha and Gujranwala, and previously unreported areas, whereas Ali and Ripley (1973) reported its presence in the Punjab salt range, Roberts (1991) reported it in Punjab (Lahore, Kasur, lakes of Salt ranges, Potohar, around Islamabad and Sialkot), and Pyhala (2001) found it at Rawal Lake.

### *Motacilla cinerea*

It has been confirmed in Kashmir and New Mirpur, Chitral, Gilgit, Baltistan, Streams of Safed Koh, Baluchistan (Quetta), Punjab (Murree Hills, Rawal Lake and Islamabad), N.W.F.P, and Sind. This species has been found in Abbotabad, Chillas and Kohistan, as well as previously unreported areas, however Roberts (1991) reported its presence in Murree Hills and Baluchistan and Pyhala (2001) reported it at Rawal Lake.

### CONCLUSION

During this study, a significant role, i.e. a scavenging role, of yellow wagtails has been identified in the study area as most of the wagtails were found on dump and metropolitan areas consuming rotten and dead materials. Therefore, from the current study it may be suggested that yellow wagtails may play an important scavenging role in the absence of vultures after their recent downfall, but these important results could not be significantly shown by the wagtails unless their population increased considerably.

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