

Desert Wheatear *Oenanthe deserti* at Lake Turkana – the fourth record of the species for Kenya

The Desert Wheatear *Oenanthe deserti* is a Palaearctic species that winters in northern Africa from Mauritania east to Ethiopia and south to 1°N in South Sudan (Lewis & Pomeroy 1989). It is a vagrant in Kenya, with only three previous records: two individuals on 17 February 1984 at Kiunga, and one on 18 October 1996 in the Kerio Valley (Bird Committee, EANHS 2009); and one adult male in Nairobi National Park on 17 November 2016 (Fisher & Hunter 2018).

On 8 February 2018 while on an ornithological survey at the Lake Turkana Wind Power site, we observed a Desert Wheatear about 500m outside the staff village (2°29'02.4" N, 36°50'13.2" E; 743m) in an area of scattered shrubs on barren rocky soil with sparse tussock-like grass. The bird struck us as a little odd compared to the Isabelline Wheatears *O. isabellina* and Pied Wheatears *O. pleschanka* we had been observing at the site. We quickly took a few photographs before the bird flew off; and on reviewing them it was clearly an adult female Desert Wheatear. The bird had a completely black tail that was only white at the base and under-tail coverts, immediately suggesting a Desert Wheatear. Additionally, the scapulars were noticeably pale (giving them a silvery appearance) and the face was rather plain with a very indistinct superciliary stripe. These three features ruled out all other wheatears that occur in Kenya and left us in no doubt that this was indeed the fourth record of Desert Wheatear for the country.

Although considered a vagrant in Kenya, this species might be a more regular (though scarce) visitor to the arid areas of the northern and eastern border areas and might pass unnoticed because of the absence of observers. In recent years insecurity has long been a major factor contributing to the under-exploration of northern and eastern Kenya. The avifauna of these areas is less well known compared with the rest of the country.



Figure 1. Adult female Desert Wheatear *Oenanthe deserti* at the Lake Turkana Wind Power site, 8 February 2018 (photo: Sidney Shema).

References

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