

## **The first confirmed record of Citrine Wagtail *Motacilla citreola* (Pallas, 1776) in Malta**

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On 12 August 2012, local birdwatcher Stephen Cilia found and photographed a juvenile Citrine Wagtail *Motacilla citreola* at Wied Il-Kbir, Qormi. The bird was not seen on the following two days, but then early on the 15 August the wagtail was relocated again by Stephen Cilia, who was also with Charles Coleiro. At 10.15 CET I visited the place and immediately found the bird actively feeding along a freshwater pool in the valley.

All diagnostic features of this species were noticed, including the double broad white wing bar and white undertail coverts; greyish upperparts; palish lores and front of forehead; pale circle to cheeks; and darkish bill. The tail length measured something in between Grey and Yellow Wagtails – seemed longer than in Yellow (*Motacilla flava*) and shorter than in Grey Wagtail (*Motacilla cinerea*).

The wagtail was easily approached, and I managed to get to within around three metres of the bird. It was heard calling a few times; the call was similar to that of a Yellow Wagtail but seemed a bit louder. Two Grey Wagtails were also present for comparison.

Following my sighting, a few other birdwatchers went to see it the following day (16 August).

The Citrine Wagtail breeds on wet meadows and taiga bogs, at lakesides and along rivers primarily in Asia, but its distribution stretches also far west into Eastern Europe where it has expanded its range westwards in recent decades. It winters in the Middle East, Eastern Arabia and Southern Asia. (Shirihai H. & Svensson L. 2018). This species was an expected rarity to be observed in Malta after increasing numbers of this bird have been reported in Western Europe, including Italy and Sicily over the past 15 years or so. Since this first sighting of this species another nine records (mostly juveniles) of Citrine Wagtails were recorded in Malta.

The Malta Rarities and Records Committee assessed this observation and confirmed it as the first record on 7 November 2012.

The Maltese name given to Citrine Wagtail is *Zakak tal-Lvant*.

## References

Shirihai, H. & Svensson, L. 2018. *Handbook of Western Palearctic Birds*. Volume I. Helm.

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**Figure 1.** Citrine Wagtail as seen in Qormi