

# Sighting of white-throated *vittata* morph of Pied Wheatear *Oenanthe pleschanka* from Tabo, Spiti Valley, Himachal Pradesh

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Pied Wheatear *Oenanthe pleschanka* is a summer visitor to Afghanistan, NWFP (Pakistan) and Kashmir at altitudes between 2700 m and 4000 m, and is a passage migrant in Pakistan, but a vagrant or irregular straggler elsewhere (Rasmussen & Anderton 2012). However, in the species distribution map of the accompanying field guide, a two-way migration across Himachal Pradesh has been shown. Though in regular plumage the species is similar to the *capistrata* morph of Variable Wheatear *O. picata*, a rarer white-throated morph known, *vittata*, also exists. This note describes the sighting of a male and female *vittata* morph of Pied Wheatear from Spiti Valley in Himachal Pradesh.

Three of us, Sivaramakrishnan, Ratna Ghosh, and I, toured Himachal Pradesh between 25 May and 11 June 2013. On 06 June 2013 we were driving towards Tabo and were a kilometer short of Lari village (32°05'N, 78°24'E) at 0830 hrs, when Krishnan and I noticed bird movement on a boulder-filled field on our right. We alighted from the vehicle and walked into the field. Then we noticed this white and black bird and thought it to be our third sighting of the Pied Wheatear during the trip. When we got closer to the bird we noticed that unlike the Pied, the throat of this bird was white. On checking our field guide (Grimmett *et al.* 2011), we didn't find an illustration that fitted the description and there was no mention of any morph for the Pied Wheatear.



Photos: S. Jha

66. Male Pied Wheatear *Oenanthe pleschanka vittata*, Tabo, Himachal Pradesh.



67. Female Pied Wheatear *Oenanthe pleschanka*, Tabo, Himachal Pradesh.

We wondered if it was a partial albino or a morph. Interestingly, on playing the call of a Pied Wheatear, the bird responded immediately, coming very close to us and then flying away. Suddenly we saw a brownish bird and realised it was the female. This bird too responded to the playback of the call. I took several photographs of the male as well as the female [66–67]. Apart from this sighting, we saw the regular morph of Pied Wheatear on four occasions between Puh and Kaza during this trip.

On my return to Kolkata, I circulated the photographs and one of the correspondents (Manjula Mathur *pers. comm.* June 2013) drew my attention to the illustration of *vittata* in Rasmussen & Anderton (2012) that seemed to match my photographs.

As per published material, it seems that this sighting may be the first report of the *vittata* morph of Pied Wheatear from India.

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## References

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