

Leg colour in Grey Wagtail *Motacilla cinerea*

Maulik Varu, Gaurang Bagda & Prasad Ganpule

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Maulik Varu, C/o Physiology Department, Govt. Medical College, Bhavnagar 364001, Gujarat, India. Email: drmaulikvaru@yahoo.com

Gaurang Bagda, 22/44 Morari Nagar, Near Alpha School-2, Opp. Avanti Apartment, Laxminagar, Junagadh 362001, Gujarat, India.

Email: gaurangbagda@gmail.com

Prasad Ganpule, C/o Parshuram Pottery Works, Nazarbaug, Morbi 363642, Gujarat, India. Email: prasadganpule@gmail.com

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Identification of wagtails (Motacillidae) is not easy. In Gujarat, all the six species of wagtails reported from India are recorded, with Grey Wagtail *Motacilla cinerea* occurring as a winter migrant (Kazmierczak 2002; Grimmett *et al.* 2011; Rasmussen & Anderton 2012).

Leg colour is an important character in the identification of Grey Wagtail, which has pink or brownish-pink legs. We have observed more than 50 different individuals in the past ten years and specifically noted the leg colour of these birds [203]. We have also looked at various images on birding websites from India to check and confirm this characteristic. Grey Wagtails *always* show pink or brownish pink legs. This is a critical diagnostic for identification as Yellow Wagtail *M. flava*, Citrine Wagtail *M. citreola*, White Wagtail *M. alba*, and White-browed Wagtail *M. maderaspatensis*, show

This feature is often overlooked and not shown in several works (Grimmett *et al.* 1998, 2011; Kazmierczak 2000; Ali & Ripley 2007; Rasmussen & Anderton 2012). Dharmakumarsinhji (1955) notes in the text that leg colour is 'horny brown' in Grey Wagtail. This is correctly given in text in Alström & Mild (2003), who state for the Grey Wagtail, 'The legs are pale pinkish, unlike in all other wagtails in post juvenile plumages, except Mountain Wagtail *M. clara*' (which does not occur in India). Taylor (2004) also gives leg colour as 'pinkish-brown or dark flesh-brown'. Illustrations in Rasmussen & Anderton (2012) show brownish legs, and those in Grimmett *et al.* (1998, 2011), black, which is erroneous. However, the illustration in Kazmierczak (2002) correctly shows pinkish legs.

Thus leg colour can be used as an important identification tool for Grey Wagtails.

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Photo: G. Bagda

203. Grey Wagtail *Motacilla cinerea* showing pinkish-brown legs at Girnar Wildlife Sanctuary, Junagadh, Gujarat, on 06 April 2014.

dark blackish legs. Forest Wagtail *Dendronanthus indicus* has pink legs but its plumage is uniquely different from other wagtails and unmistakable. Amongst the confusing wagtails, it is possible to separate Grey Wagtail from the others based upon leg colour alone in first-winter, and adult, plumages. Hence in addition to other identification characters, leg colour can be used to separate the Grey Wagtail from other wagtails.