

Status of various subspecies of White Wagtail *Motacilla alba* at Pong Lake, Himachal Pradesh, India

C. Abhinav

Abhinav. C. 202X. Status of various subspecies of White Wagtail *Motacilla alba* at Pong Lake, Himachal Pradesh, India. *Indian BIRDS* 22 (X): XX–XX
C. Abhinav, Village & P.O. Ghurkari, Kangra 176001, Himachal Pradesh, India. Email: drabhinav.c@gmail.com
Manuscript received on 17 May 2025.

White Wagtail *Motacilla alba* is a polytypic species, currently considered to include ten subspecies (Clements et al. 2024). Some of these are treated as full species (Rasmussen & Anderton 2012). As per current knowledge, six groups (comprising six or seven subspecies, depending upon taxonomy) of White Wagtail are known to occur in India: *alba/dukhunensis*, *personata*, *ocularis*, *baicalensis*, *alboides* and *leucopsis* (Grimmett et al. 2011; Rasmussen & Anderton 2012), some breeding but all of them wintering in the region. Of these, *personata* and *alboides* have breeding ranges that overlap in India in the high-altitudes of the Himalayan mountains. In the Western Himalaya, both subspecies breed, while breeding range of *alboides* extends through Eastern Himalaya and further east. All other subspecies that occur in India are winter visitors from more northern latitudes: *alba* and *dukhunensis* breed further west to *ocularis*, *baicalensis* and *leucopsis*. Widespread intergradation occurs where the breeding ranges of subspecies meet (Badyaev et al. 2020). As *alba* and *dukhunensis* are not always separable, these are treated together as *alba/dukhunensis* in this note. White Wagtail is sometimes classified into black-backed (*alboides* and *leucopsis*) and grey-backed subspecies (the rest), based on the colour of the back of breeding males (Kazmierczak 2000). This division is for the identification purposes only and not based on phylogenetic relationships (Rasmussen & Anderton 2012).

White Wagtail prefers open areas with expanses of short grass, often near water, and is frequently observed in towns (Rasmussen & Anderton 2012). Despite being a common wintering bird in India, our knowledge regarding the exact range and abundance of various subspecies is still deficient. To understand this, we need to identify and monitor sites that host large numbers of White Wagtail during winter. Pong Lake in Himachal Pradesh is one such site. It is a large reservoir on the Beas River (up to 156.62 sq. km), also known as Maharana Pratap Sagar (Ramsar Sites Information Service 2002), which is protected as a Wildlife Sanctuary and designated as a Ramsar Site (Rahmani et al. 2016). Situated in the Kangra District, north of the plains of northern Indian and southwest of the Western Himalaya, it is a suitable staging point for the birds migrating across the Himalaya. Pong Lake experiences annual dynamics in water level due to draining that results in a vast exposed drawdown area of about 50–220 sq. km (Rahmani et al. 2016) every winter, creating ideal habitat for wagtails and pipits.

During spring and early summer, the water level decreases further, and the exposed mudflats are quickly colonized by grass, supporting a rich invertebrate population. Due to extensive grazing by domestic animals, the grass remains short, providing a more suitable habitat for pipits and wagtails (Motacillidae) during this season [1]. The wagtails and other birds spend a few days, or longer, at the site while migrating back to their breeding grounds in summer. As a result, the number of wagtails increases significantly during March and April, when multiple flocks of wagtails (Citrine Wagtail *M. citreola*, White Wagtail, and Western Yellow Wagtail *M. flava*) arrive, sometimes numbering up to 100 individuals or even more. By early May, the flats may extend up to 3 km from the shoreline. This is also an ideal time to observe wagtails because many individuals are in partial or full breeding plumage. I used this opportunity to monitor wagtails for two years at Pong Lake, and this note documents the status of various subspecies of white wagtails at the site.



[1] The flats around the Pong Lake covered with carpet of short green grass on 12 May 2025. All Photos: C. Abhinav

The White Wagtail was recorded during numerous birding trips to the Pong Lake over the past 15 years, initially observed casually, but with more focused attention from late March to early May over the past eight years. In the last two years, from February 2024 to May 2025, all wagtails observed during the visits were either photographed or carefully observed and systematically counted. During the winter, counts were carried out roughly once a month, whereas during periods of passage migration, particularly the spring migration from late March to early May, counts were conducted at least once every 10 days. The exact schedule was flexible and dependent on time availability. Although there are many suitable habitats around the lake, logistical limitations allowed for focused surveys in only two areas: Nagrota Surian, located in the north-eastern part of the lake, and Guglara, near Jawali. At Nagrota Surian, the start and end points of the survey area were not fixed, as the receding water level caused these boundaries to shift progressively towards the lake. However, the total area covered did not change significantly, as wagtails were primarily found in greener, wetter grass patches, which typically extended from a few meters inland to about 500 m from the shoreline. This distance varied slightly depending on local elevation, the presence or absence of water channels, and other unidentified factors. The wagtails were also found in the wet stony areas and mudflats along the shoreline. The total length of the surveyed flat was approximately 4–5 km, ranging from the Menu Khadd area (32.030°N, 76.079°E) and (32.009°N, 76.007°E) to the crematorium area (32.048°N, 76.061°E) and (32.024°N, 76.031°E). In May, additional areas beyond the usual survey zone became exposed as water receded further. Occasionally, Ranser Island also became accessible, but by that time, almost all White Wagtails had already passed through.

At the Guglara site near Jawali, the survey area consisted of an irregular landmass that was surrounded by water on three sides. The coordinates of the border points of this area are: (32.055°N, 76.009°E), (32.052°N, 76.011°E), (32.048°N, 76.008°E), (32.054°N, 75.999°E) and (32.058°N, 75.991°E). The area surveyed at Guglara remained fairly consistent, as the shoreline here at this time of the year had a steeper slope, and the further drop in water level did not significantly affect the accessible area. The shoreline at this site is more irregular, and the flats within c.300 m from the water's edge were surveyed. Surveys in this area were mainly conducted from mid-March to early April. Outside this window, most surveys were concentrated at Nagrota Surian, as in Guglara the grass became drier and further wetter patches were not exposed, resulting in fall in number of wagtails. Counts began at sunrise and typically lasted about four hours, as ample time was given for photographing and closely observing individuals. Approximately 10–15% of the birds could not be identified to subspecies level due to limited observation or poor visibility; these individuals are not included in Table 1. Therefore, the actual number of wagtails observed was slightly higher than the total shown in the table. The *baicalensis* is inseparable from *alba/dukhunensis* during winter, thus all these birds were counted under *alba/dukhunensis/baicalensis* during winter. When they started assuming breeding plumage in spring, they were counted under respective subspecies. Because of the heavy and prolonged monsoon in 2025, and flooding of the flats around the Pong Lake, I could not cover the autumn migration of 2025. The results of these counts are presented below in Table 1.

d

S. No.	Dates	<i>alboides</i>	<i>leucopsis</i>	<i>alba/dukhunensis</i>	<i>alba/dukhunensis/baicalensis</i>	<i>personata</i>	<i>baicalensis</i>	<i>ocularis</i>	Total
1	15 February 2024				15	4			19
2	10 March 2024	1			30	15			46
3	06 April 2024	2		40	25	11	2	2	82
4	11 April 2024			18	8	4	2	1	33
5	23 April 2024			8			1		9
6	03 May 2024								0
7	01 September 2024					8			8
8	08 September 2024					120			120
9	15 September 2024					80			80
10	22 September 2024				1	35			36
11	10 November 2024	1			10				10
12	01 December 2024				34	6			40
13	12 January 2025		1		24	5			30
14	01 February 2025	1			15	3			19
15	16 March 2025			1	27	22			50
16	24 March 2025	3		17	71	30	2	2	125
17	14 April 2025	1		90	2	12	3	3	111
18	20 April 2025			72	1	4	4	2	83
19	29 April 2025			17	1		3		21
20	12 May 2025								0
	Total	9	1	263	264	359	17	10	921

White Wagtail (White-faced) *Motacilla alba alba/dukhunensis*

The *dukhunensis* is characterized by a grey back, white face and a black throat in breeding plumage (Ali & Ripley 1987; Alström & Mild 2003). Its breeding range spans east of the range of *alba* which breeds across much of Europe; lying east of Ural Mountains, Caucasus and north-western Iran (Badyaev et al. 2020). Clements et al. (2024) and Badyaev et al. (2020) treat *alba* and *dukhunensis* as separate subspecies. The *dukhunensis* closely resembles western populations of *alba* (hence the combined treatment here), though it typically has paler grey upperparts, and the tips and edges of the median coverts, greater coverts and tertials are usually wider and purer white. Many adult males display extensive white on the wings, forming an unbroken white wing panel, through which the concealed dark centres sometimes 'shine through' to form diffuse greyish vertical bands on the greater coverts. However, many individuals are inconspicuous, and the extent of white on the wings varies, making field identification between *alba* and *dukhunensis* often extremely difficult. Alström & Mild (2003) have suggested that *dukhunensis* may be best considered a junior synonym of nominate *alba*, as the plumage differences are too small and variable to warrant recognition.

Rasmussen & Anderton (2012) mention both *alba* and *dukhunensis* as occurring in India, while other regional works list only the latter for the country. The *alba/dukhunensis* is the most common wintering subspecies of White Wagtail in India, found across much of the country, becoming scarcer to the southern peninsula (Ali & Ripley 1987; Grimmett et al. 1998, 2011; Rasmussen & Anderton 2012). At Pong Lake, *alba/dukhunensis* was the most frequently recorded subspecies of White Wagtail during winter, with numbers increasing through March and April (as it is reasonable to assume that *alba/dukhunensis/baicalensis* were largely *alba/dukhunensis*). Several birds were seen in full breeding plumage during this time, with some showing reduced white on the wings, resembling western *alba* [2]. Since the wintering of *alba* has not been definitively confirmed in India and given the variation in the plumage, it is difficult to determine whether these are western-breeding *alba* or *dukhunensis* showing variation. Other individuals displayed a distinct white wing panel, typical of adult *dukhunensis* [3]. Both types of birds were frequently recorded at Pong Lake, but numbers were not separated due to the lack of clear distinguishing features, and several birds showing intermediate features. Birds resembling the western *alba* were much fewer than *dukhunensis*. The *alba/dukhunensis* was seen in good numbers during winter and spring migration but not during autumn migration. The maximum count was 90 individuals recorded on 14 April 2025.



[2] A White Wagtail resembling western *alba* showing reduced white on the wings in full breeding plumage on 03 April 2018



[3] A typical of adult *dukhunensis* showing distinct white wing panel in full breeding plumage on 23 March 2025

White Wagtail (Masked) *Motacilla alba personata*

The *personata* has a grey-back and a black face, and except for a white forehead and periocular mask, it is similar to *alboides* (Ali & Ripley 1987; Alström & Mild 2003) (Pic 4). Regional works (Whistler 1926; Grimmett et al. 1998, 2011; Rasmussen & Anderton 2012) mention its breeding range in north-western Himalaya, including Himachal Pradesh and its widespread wintering presence across the Indian subcontinent, where it becomes gradually rarer southwards (Alström & Mild 2003). This subspecies is commonly observed around Pong Lake from early September to end April and is the second most common subspecies of White Wagtail in the area during winter. Its numbers are augmented during migration months (i.e., September, October, March, and April) by the birds in passage. During these months, multiple flocks of *personata*, or mixed flocks including *alba/dukhunensis* and other wagtail species were frequently encountered. Flock sizes usually range from a few individuals to several dozen. Interestingly, almost all the White Wagtails observed in September were identified as *personata*, and they were present in substantial numbers.



[4] A breeding male *personata* on 10 March 2020

White Wagtail (ocularis) *Motacilla alba ocularis*

This subspecies of White Wagtail has a distinctive black eye-stripe that separates it from other subspecies in all plumages (Ali & Ripley 1987; Alström & Mild 2003). Grimmett et al. (1998) and Alström & Mild (2003) mentioned/depicted it as winter visitor to northern and north-eastern India. The latter also reports its wintering in north-eastern peninsular India, and rarely as far west as Rajasthan, based on personal observations, though no specific details were provided. In contrast, Rasmussen & Anderton (2012) list it only from north-eastern India and west to central Nepal; while Ali & Ripley (1987) more specifically mentioned it from Assam, Nagaland, Manipur, and Bangladesh as part of its wintering range. It is considered uncommon to rare in India (Ali & Ripley 1987; Grimmett et al. 1998, 2011; Rasmussen & Anderton 2012).

There are only a few confirmed records of *ocularis* outside eastern and north-eastern India. A bird was trapped at Harike Lake, Punjab, on 31 March 1985, followed by two subsequent observations (Akhtar & Prakash 1989). More recent records outside eastern and north-eastern India include sightings at Mattu Beach, Udipi District, Karnataka on 15 October 2018 (Manimoolle 2018); Khichan, Phalodi District, Rajasthan on 29 January 2019 (van der Vliet et al. 2019); West Banas Dam area, Sirohi District, Rajasthan on 10 December 2021 (Sahil 2021); Sindhu Ghat, Leh District, UT of Ladakh on 29 April 2023 (Srinivasan 2023); and Prayagraj, Prayagraj District, Uttar Pradesh on 26 March 2024 (Singh 2024). Most of these records are from the past decade, likely reflecting a surge in birdwatching activity and reporting coverage across India. There are also unverified sight records from Jodhpur District, Rajasthan (Anonymous eBirder 2014); Man Sagar Lake, Jaipur District, Rajasthan (Hemmings 2015); and Naviyani, Surendranagar District, Gujarat (Kirwan 2023). Vyas (2019) does not mention this subspecies for the well-covered Delhi region. Pfister (2004) considered it a rare passage migrant in Ladakh.

On 31 January 2012, I photographed a White Wagtail at Nagrota Surian that resembled *alba/dukhunensis* [5]. It was grey-backed, white-faced, and had a thin black eye-stripe that extended from the base of the bill to the rear edge of the ear coverts. This feature helped identify it as *ocularis* even in non-breeding plumage. During the surveys, as closer attention was paid to all individuals of White Wagtail, I was able to detect this subspecies regularly during spring passage. A total of 10 individuals were recorded, out of which nine are shown in [5] and labelled as 1–9. They were observed over two years on five different days, with 1–3 birds seen on each occasion. All individuals were either in non-breeding plumage or in partial breeding plumage, except for two birds (bird no. 8 and 9) observed on 20 April 2025 in full breeding plumage [5, 6]. Considering the areas where the birds were recorded, plumage and sex, except for one record, there seems little possibility of duplication. Bird no. 4 had pale lores, which indicated that it might be a hybrid. In bird no. 3, the eye-stripe extended in front of the eye but was just short of the bill. In bird no. 8, the eye-stripe was thin and broken behind the eye. It could not be ascertained whether the plumages of these two birds were within expected variation, or indicated signs of hybridization.



[5] Different individuals of *ocularis* found during the study

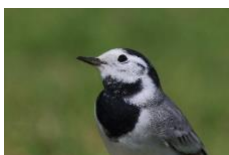


[6] An adult male *ocularis* in full breeding plumage on 20 April 2025

Dhadwal (2019) has not reported *ocularis* from Pong Lake or anywhere in Himachal Pradesh. Therefore, these records appear to be the first for the state and contribute to the small number of confirmed observations of this subspecies outside eastern and north-eastern India. The present study reveals that this subspecies is a rare winter visitor and an uncommon but regular passage migrant at Pong Lake.

White Wagtail (Transbaikalian) *Motacilla alba baicalensis*

The *baicalensis* subspecies is very similar to *alba/dukhunensis*, however, in breeding plumage, a white throat instead of black separates it from a breeding *alba/dukhunensis* (Ali & Ripley 1987; Alström & Mild 2003). A majority of males have a black lower throat, and white central and upper throat [7, 8], while some males and most females have a complete white throat [9, 10] (Alström & Mild 2003). There is considerable confusion in the identification of *baicalensis*, as on several occasions white-faced and grey-backed individuals of White Wagtail in non-breeding plumage (*alba/dukhunensis* and *baicalensis*) were erroneously labelled as *baicalensis*, because such birds also have a white throat and black breast like *baicalensis* in breeding plumage. The breeding *alba/dukhunensis* can be easily separated by a black chin and throat while in non-breeding plumage it has a white chin, throat, and upper breast, creating confusion. However, the black breast-patch is narrower in these non-breeding birds than that of *baicalensis* in breeding plumage (Alström & Mild 2003). In other words, these birds in non-breeding plumage have a white upper breast [11, 12], which is black in breeding *baicalensis*. The *baicalensis* in non-breeding plumage is similar to non-breeding *alba/dukhunensis*, thus can't be separated.



[7] A male *baicalensis* in full breeding plumage showing white upper throat on 23 April 2023



[8] Another male *baicalensis* in full breeding plumage showing white upper throat on 23 April 2023



[9] A *baicalensis* showing complete white throat and black breast on 20 April 2025. A female probably, as there was no sharp contrast between the black of head and the grey of back and there were grey patches over the black of head.



[10] Another *baicalensis* showing complete white throat and black breast on 06 April 2024; also, a female as in [9].



[11] An *alba/dukhunensis* in non-breeding plumage on 25 March 2018 showing white throat and white upper breast.



[12] A *baicalensis* in non-breeding plumage on 19 March 2019 respectively white throat and white upper breast.

Due to identification challenges in non-breeding plumage, the exact wintering range of subspecies *baicalensis* in India remains uncertain. Grimmett et al. (1998) mentioned it as a passage migrant only to Nepal, while Grimmett et al. (2011) suggest it is a widespread winter visitor. Alström & Mild (2003) have shown it from northern India, along with central, eastern and north-eastern India in their distribution map. Ali & Ripley (1987) reported it as an uncommon winter visitor to Assam, Bangladesh, Madhupur in Bihar, Sikkim, Bengal duars, Nepal, and probably further west in the plains of northern India. Roonwal (1939) mentioned that there were many specimens of this subspecies in the Indian Museum from as far north-west as Kashgar (China), Gilgit, and Ladakh, and also from Shimla and Sikkim in India (Ali & Ripley 1987). However, it seems that some confusion was involved, as its separation from *personata* was discussed but not with similar looking *alba/dukhunensis*. Moreover Rasmussen & Anderton (2012), in which distributions are mostly based on specimens, mention that it is mainly found in north-eastern India where it is rare. Dhadwal (2019) provided a photograph of this species; however, the bird in the photograph was in non-breeding plumage, in which it cannot be separated from *alba/dukhunensis*. In Ladakh, it is listed as a sporadic migrant (Pfister 2004). The scarcity of confirmed records of this subspecies in India, can be judged from the fact that photographic evidence exists from only two locations in north-eastern India (Ali 2021; Sahana 2022), and only one from central India (Neve 2023) on eBird.

On 23 April 2023, while birding in Nagrota Surian, I observed a wagtail in full breeding plumage that closely resembled *alba/dukhunensis*, but with a distinctive throat pattern [8]. The upper throat was white, while the lower throat was black, and there was a sharp contrast between the black of head and the grey of back, suggesting that it was a male *baicalensis*. I visited again after a week, but it was not seen again despite considerable effort. During the counts, more wagtails belonging to this subspecies and of either sex were recorded at these two sites [10]. These were recorded only during spring passage, as *baicalensis* can be separated from *alba/dukhunensis* only after it attains either full or almost full breeding plumage. The earliest recorded date for this subspecies was 24 March 2025 in the present study. Among 280 wagtails identified conclusively as either *alba/dukhunensis* or *baicalensis*, 263 were *M. a. alba* or *M. a. dukhunensis*, while 17 (6%) were *M. a. baicalensis*. These regular records in significant numbers indicate that it is not uncommon at Pong Lake during passage and probably in its wintering grounds too, which lie further south in the country.

White Wagtail (Hodgson's) *Motacilla alba alboides*

The *alboides* has a black back and black face except for a white forehead and periocular mask (Ali & Ripley 1987; Alström & Mild 2003) [13]. Grimmett et al. (1998, 2011) and Alström & Mild (2003) have mentioned that it winters in northern and north-eastern India. However, Ali & Ripley (1987) describe its wintering range as primarily eastern and north-eastern India, from the plains of Bihar to further east. Rasmussen & Anderton (2012) have also depicted its wintering range from central Nepal eastward and have shown it as a passage migrant in the foothills of Western Himalaya, though their text also refers to it as a 'winter visitor to Northern Plains and South Assam Hills'.

I found that this subspecies winters in small numbers at Pong Lake each year. It is common to encounter one or two *alboides* during visits to Nagrota Surian or Guglara, between October and February. During March and April, its numbers increase slightly due to the arrival of migrating birds and sightings become more frequent at these locations. During the surveys, a total of nine individuals were recorded. This suggests that *alboides* is less abundant in its wintering grounds in Himachal Pradesh than in its breeding grounds in the high-altitudes of the Himalaya and Trans-Himalayan regions of Spiti, where it is seen in good numbers during summer (pers. observation). The counts also indicate that it is much less numerous than *alba/dukhunensis* and *personata* even during migration. However, 14 *alboides* were observed feeding alongside approximately equal numbers of *personata* in a loose flock on 09 February 2026 at Nagrota Surian. Whether such large flocks of *alboides* regularly winter at Pong Lake or whether this was an exceptional sighting remains unclear, as the present study includes very few winter counts. Dhadwal (2019) has also reported *alboides* from Pong Lake. These repeated winter records confirm that *alboides* regularly winters at Pong Lake and more broadly in Himachal Pradesh.



[13] An *alboides* male in breeding plumage on 19 March 2019

White Wagtail (Chinese) *Motacilla alba leucopsis*

The *leucopsis* has a black back and white face (Ali & Ripley 1987; Alström & Mild 2003). In India, it is a winter visitor to north-eastern India, and Andaman Islands; and northern India, with uncommon records westward to Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, and Punjab (Grimmett et al. 1998, 2011; Alström & Mild 2003). Rasmussen & Anderton (2012) describe it as a common winter visitor mainly to north-eastern India; while Ali & Ripley (1987) note its range from north-eastern India to as west as eastern Uttar Pradesh and central Nepal and possibly to Shimla. Recent records are from as far west as Uttarakhand, the Delhi region, eastern-most Rajasthan, Gujarat and further south too (Vyas 2019; Praveen 2025).

I recorded a *leucopsis* male in breeding plumage on 30 March 2019 in Guglara area of Pong Lake [14], where it was feeding in the flats alongside wagtails. It was observed again a week later at the same spot but not seen after that. The following year, on 10 March 2020, I photographed another individual at Guglara. During the surveys conducted over the past two years, *leucopsis* was recorded only once on 12 January 2025 at Nagrota Surian. This subspecies has been reported from Pong Lake earlier (Dhadwal 2019) but without details and status. Based on these observations, *leucopsis* appears to be a rare winter visitor and a rare passage migrant at Pong Lake.



[14] A *leucopsis* male in breeding plumage on 30 March 2019

Discussion

Although the counts were conducted for only a little over one year, from February 2024 to May 2025, covering one winter, two spring migrations, and one autumn migration, this period is insufficient to draw robust conclusions. Nevertheless, the study provides several important insights that are discussed below. Between 2001 and 2003, den Besten (2004) recorded 1,581 individuals of White Wagtail during 90 visits to various sections of Pong Lake. However, he did not distinguish between the different subspecies or ascertain their respective status. In comparison, my study recorded 921 White Wagtails (plus 10–15% unidentified White Wagtails) over just 20 visits. This relatively higher number is likely due to my focus on migration periods—when wagtail numbers peak—and my study was specifically focused on wagtails, so I targeted suitable wagtail habitats more intensively. I must caution that the total similar available habitat for the wagtails is perhaps more than 10 times the area surveyed on any day, and the less suitable habitats are even much larger. Therefore, the actual number of White Wagtails present at Pong Lake at any given time is likely much higher than the counts presented in Table 1. This study indicates that the spring migration of the White Wagtail peaks during late March and early April and concludes by the end of April. No White Wagtails were recorded during visits in early May, a period when Western Yellow Wagtail continued migrating through the lake.

Dhadwal (2019) did report five subspecies of White Wagtail from Pong Lake, though their abundance was not detailed. Alström & Mild (2003) mapped six subspecies wintering in northern India, but specific locations of rare subspecies and their abundance were not discussed. There are very few well documented records of *ocularis* and *baicalensis* from regions outside eastern and north-eastern India, while *leucopsis* is uncommon to rare in northern India, (discussed above in the relevant sections). This note, apart from expanding our knowledge on the status of various subspecies of White Wagtail in Pong Lake, adds to the scarce records of *ocularis* and *baicalensis* outside eastern and north-eastern India. The records of these two subspecies appear to be the first confirmed records for Himachal Pradesh. This study indicates that *ocularis* migrates regularly through Pong Lake, perhaps, in small numbers. It is likely overlooked in its wintering grounds across the northern plains of India and further south and west, given that the number of individuals recorded over the past two years exceeds the total previous records from outside eastern and north-eastern India. Similarly, the study also suggests that *baicalensis* occurs in good numbers beyond traditionally recognized areas. This supports the range data provided by Grimmett et al. (2011) and Alström & Mild (2003), which appear to be more accurate than those proposed in other works. However, the precise wintering range and local abundance of *baicalensis* remain uncertain, because it cannot be reliably distinguished from *alba/dukhunensis* in the field during winter. Multiple records of all the subspecies of White Wagtail that are known to occur in India at a single location is significant and highlights the rich avifaunal diversity of Pong Lake. The large congregations observed during spring migration underscore the importance of this Ramsar site as both a crucial stopover and a viable wintering habitat for migratory birds, reinforcing the need for its continued protection.

Although White Wagtail is common across India, most birders do not document its subspecies, leading to under-reporting of the rarer forms. I was only able to record the uncommon subspecies after I began photographing and closely observing all individuals, which I had previously overlooked during more casual observations. From a distance, *ocularis* and *baicalensis* resemble *alba/dukhunensis* and can be easily overlooked. I strongly recommend that fellow birders carefully examine all white-faced individuals of White Wagtail to identify these two lesser-known subspecies. This is possibly the first photographic study to focus entirely on the distribution and migration patterns of various White Wagtail subspecies at a single site in India. It is also intended to encourage other birders to document subspecies more rigorously, to improve our understanding of their precise wintering ranges and status in India.

I thank Prasad Ganpule for reviewing the initial draft of this note and Per Alström for enhancing my interest in pipits and wagtails by his excellent monograph on this subject and encouragement during a meeting.

References

- Akhtar, S. A., & Prakash, V., 1989. Streaked Pied Wagtail, *Motacilla alba ocularis* Swinhoe from Harike Lake, Punjab. *Journal of the Bombay Natural History Society* 86 (2):246.
- Ali, A., 2021. Webpage URL: <https://ebird.org/checklist/S84248080>. [Accessed on 21 June 2026].
- Ali, S., & Ripley, S. D., 1987. *Compact handbook of the birds of India and Pakistan together with those of Bangladesh, Nepal, Bhutan and Sri Lanka*, 2nd edn. Oxford University Press, Delhi. Pp. i–xlii, 1 l., 1–737, 52 ll.
- Alström, P., & Mild, K., 2003. *Pipits & Wagtails of Europe, Asia and North America. Identification and systematics*, 1st edn. Christopher Helm (Publishers) Ltd, London. Pp. 1–496.
- Anonymous eBirder, 2014. Webpage URL: <https://ebird.org/checklist/S127754214>. [Accessed on 21 June 2026].

- Badyaev, A. V., Gibson, D. D., Kessel, B., Pyle, P., & Patten, M. A., 2020. White Wagtail (*Motacilla alba*), version 1.0. In Birds of the World (S. M. Billerman, Editor). Cornell Lab of Ornithology, Ithaca, NY, USA. Webpage URL: <https://birdsoftheworld.org/bow/species/whiwag/cur/introduction>. [Accessed on 21 June 2026].
- Clements, J. F., Rasmussen, P. C., Schulenberg, T. S., Iliff, M. J., Fredericks, T. A., Gerbracht, J. A., Lepage, D., Spencer, A., Billerman, S. M., Sullivan, B. L., Smith, M., & Wood, C. L., 2024. Webpage URL: <https://www.birds.cornell.edu/clementschecklist/download/>. [Accessed on 10 September 2024].
- den Besten, J. W., 2004. *Birds of Kangra*, 1st edn. Moonpeak Publishers & Mosaic Books, Dharamsala & New Delhi. Pp. 1–176.
- Dhadwal, D. S., 2019. *Birds of Himachal Pradesh (Passerine)*. Published by the author, India. Vol. 2 of 2 vols. Pp. 1–340.
- Grimmett, R., Inskipp, C., & Inskipp, T., 1998. *Birds of the Indian Subcontinent*, 1st edn. Christopher Helm, A & C Black, London. Pp. 1–888.
- Grimmett, R., Inskipp, C., & Inskipp, T., 2011. *Birds of the Indian Subcontinent*, 2nd edn. Oxford University Press & Christopher Helm, London. Pp. 1–528.
- Hemmings, F., 2015. Webpage URL: <https://ebird.org/checklist/S96495440>. [Accessed on 21 June 2026].
- Kazmierczak, K., 2000. *A field guide to the birds of India, Sri Lanka, Pakistan, Nepal, Bhutan, Bangladesh and the Maldives*, 1st edn. Pica Press / Christopher Helm, London. Pp. 1–352.
- Kirwan, G., 2023. Webpage URL: <https://ebird.org/checklist/S126685907>. [Accessed on 21 June 2026].
- Manimoolle, S. R., 2018. Webpage URL: <https://ebird.org/checklist/S49206968>. [Accessed on 21 June 2026].
- Neve, L., 2023. Webpage URL: <https://ebird.org/checklist/S130661791>. [Accessed on 21 June 2026].
- Pfister, O., 2004. *Birds and mammals of Ladakh*, 1st edn. Oxford University Press, New Delhi. Pp. i–xxvii, 1–361.
- Praveen, J., 2025. *Birds of India - The New Synopsis*. Nature Conservation Foundation, Mysuru. Pp. i–xlvii, 1–468.
- Rahmani, A. R., Zafar-ul-Islam, M., & Kasambe, R. M., 2016. *Important bird and biodiversity areas in India: Priority sites for conservation*, Revised and updated 2nd. Bombay Natural History Society, Indian Bird Conservation Network, Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, and BirdLife International (UK), India. Vol. 1 of 2 vols. Pp. 1 i., i–xii, 1–1002.
- Ramsar Sites Information Service, 2002. Webpage URL: <https://rsis Ramsar.org/ris/1211>. [Accessed on 21 June 2026].
- Rasmussen, P. C., & Anderton, J. C., 2012. *Birds of South Asia: the Ripley guide: attributes and status*, 2nd edn. Smithsonian Institution and Lynx Edicions., Washington, D.C. and Barcelona. Vol. 2 of 2 vols. Pp. 1–683.
- Roonwal, M. L., 1939. Report on a collection of birds from the Bengal Duars and the Tista Valley made in the winter of 1938, with notes on specimens in the Indian Museum. *Records of the Indian Museum* 41 (3):281–307.
- Sahana, 2022. Webpage URL: <https://ebird.org/checklist/S106945686>. [Accessed on 21 June 2026].
- Sahil, 2021. Webpage URL: <https://ebird.org/checklist/S103690777>. [Accessed on 21 June 2026].
- Singh, A., 2024. Webpage URL: <https://ebird.org/checklist/S166046235>. [Accessed on 21 June 2026].
- Srinivasan, S., 2023. Webpage URL: <https://ebird.org/checklist/S135372537>. [Accessed on 21 June 2026].
- van der Vliet, R. E., Hendriks, H., & de Rouw, P. W. W., 2019. 'East Siberian Wagtail' (White Wagtail) *Motacilla alba ocularis* in Rajasthan. *Indian BIRDS* 15 (3):95–96.
- Vyas, S., 2019. The birds of the Delhi area: An annotated checklist. *Indian BIRDS Monograph* 1:1–128.
- Whistler, H., 1926. A note on the birds of Kulu. *Journal of the Bombay Natural History Society* 31 (2):458–485.