

AN EARLY AND THE FIRST  
DOCUMENTED RECORDS OF  
CITRINE WAGTAIL *Motacilla citreola*  
IN MONTENEGRO

**Prvo dokumentirano opazovanje  
citrinaste pastirice *Motacilla citreola*  
v Črni gori**

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Since the 1980s, Citrine Wagtail *Motacilla citreola* has been known as a rare vagrant in most Central and West European countries (LEXINGTON *et al.* 1991, SNOW & PERRINS 1998). The recent increase of observations outside its regular distribution appears to be linked to the species' westward expansion in western Russia and Ukraine (MEISSNER & SKAKUJ 1997, MURAVIEV *et al.* 2014). Additionally, identification techniques and the identification skills of many birdwatchers – in particular of birds in variable 1<sup>st</sup> winter plumages – have advanced considerably over the last decades (e.g., BARTHEL 1990, ALSTRÖM & MILD 2003). With occasional nesting records outside the species' regular breeding area, scattered but established populations currently exist in Belarus, the Baltic states and Poland (MEISSNER & SKAKUJ 1997, SNOW & PERRINS 1998).

At present, the first records of Citrine Wagtail in former Yugoslavia, and in particular Montenegro, remain unclear. On 26 Apr 1987 an adult male was observed in the Sečovlje Salina, Slovenia, which is – as far as I know – the first published record for the former Yugoslav countries (POLAK 1987, HANŽEL & ŠERE 2011). In Croatia, the species was reported for the first time in May and Sept 1997 when a total of four birds were caught during ringing operations at Lake Vransko in northern Dalmatia (STIPČEVIĆ *et al.* 2000). In Apr 2014 and in Apr 2015, respectively, HULO (2013/14) and DERVOVIĆ (2014/16) added the species to the bird lists of Serbia and Bosnia-Herzegovina. In

addition, from May – Jun 2016 territorial birds and a female which was, obviously, feeding small chicks were present at Vlasina Reservoir in south-eastern Serbia (MEDENICA & MIRIĆ 2015/16). While the latter constitutes the first nesting record on the Balkan Peninsula, the species is to my knowledge not known from the Autonomous Province of Kosovo and Metohija/Republic of Kosovo (ŠCIBAN *et al.* 2015) and the present Republic of Macedonia (VELEVSKI & VASIĆ 2017).

For Montenegro, Citrine Wagtail is not listed in the digital Avibase bird check-list of the country (<http://avibase.bsc-eco.org>; last update 2 May 2006) as well as in the most recent bird list after the independence of Montenegro from the former State Union of Serbia and Montenegro in 2006 (SAVELJIĆ & JOVIĆEVIĆ 2015). In the course of an evaluation of the species' status in the country, after two current sightings in the Bojana-Buna river delta, I came upon the obituary of British ornithologist BOB SCOTT (1938–2009), published in *The Times* (London) on 4 April 2009 and in *British Birds* (NEWELL 2009). Both sources mention, besides a number of new species Mr. Scott added to the British list as well as the check-lists of some other countries, a first record of Citrine Wagtail in Montenegro, but without any further details.

The short reference to the first sighting in „Yugoslavia (Apr 1987)” in LEXINGTON *et al.* (1991: 327), later cited by HADARICS & PELLINGER (1993), apparently concerns the Slovene bird in Sečovlje (POLAK 1987). According to the wife of BOB SCOTT, Ann, the early Montenegrin record should have been published by a library or university in former Yugoslavia. Because I could not find any other publication referring to the record in Montenegro, the relevant observation was probably never formally published. However, a friend of Mrs. and Mr. Scott who was with the group of British ornithologists in Yugoslavia, remembers the bird and is certain that the sighting was made at the Ulcinj Salina in May 1982 (A. SCOTT *in litt.*, 21 May 2016). Two more recent observations in Montenegro concern a male in the Ulcinj Salina on 3 May 2013 and a female which a holiday group of Austrian birdwatchers noted in the Tivat Salina, Boka Kotorska, on 17 Apr 2014. Consequently, unaware of the 1982 sighting in Ulcinj, STUMBERGER & SAMWALD (2016) suppose



**Figure 1:** Male Citrine Wagtail *Motacilla citreola* with male Yellow Wagtail *Motacilla flava cinereocapilla*, Salina Ulcinj, Montenegro, 18 Mar 2016 (photo: P. Sackl)

**Slika 1:** Samec citronaste pastirice *Motacilla citreola* s samcem rumene pastirice *Motacilla flava cinereocapilla*, Ulcinjske soline, Črna gora, 18. 3. 2016 (foto: P. Sackl)

that their observations may constitute the first records for Montenegro.

Following to the bird in Tivat in 2014, two more Citrine Wagtails were sighted at the Ulcinj Salina: on 18 Mar 2016 I noticed a male in breeding plumage within a loose flock of approximately 25 White *Motacilla alba* and a few Yellow Wagtails *Motacilla flava* ssp. *cinereocapilla*. During the late afternoon I was able to observe the bird while feeding in the mudflats of lowly flooded



**Figure 2:** Citrine Wagtail *Motacilla citreola*, 1<sup>st</sup> winter, Ulcinj Salina, Montenegro, 20 Nov 2017 (photo: P. Sackl)

**Slika 2:** Citronasta pastirica (*Motacilla citreola*), 1y, Ulcinjske soline, Črna gora, 20. 11. 2017 (foto: P. Sackl)

evaporation basins for 2 – 3 hours, before the whole group was flushed by the locals. The single male showed a comparably narrow black to blackish-grey nape-band, interrupted on both sides, and rather narrow to almost lacking white tips and white edges on the outer greater coverts (Fig. 1). Both characteristics are indicative for 1<sup>st</sup> summer males as well as the form *weriae* which shows only slight and inconsistent differences to the nominate subspecies *citreola* (ALSTRÖM & MILD 2003). Finally, on 20 Nov 2017 I managed to shoot some pictures of a bird in 1<sup>st</sup> winter plumage on the salina's main dam, close to the evaporation basins where I saw the male in spring 2016 (Figure 2). This bird was also loosely associated with 8 – 10 mainly 1<sup>st</sup> winter White Wagtails, a seasonally late male Yellow Wagtail in winter plumage, and some Water Pipits *Anthus spinoletta*.

The late Bob Scott was a renowned ornithologist, well-respected for his identification skills, who served until his death as a member of the British Ornithologist's Union Council (BOU) and the Rarities Committee for the Seychelles (NEWELL 2009). Hence, there remains no doubt as to the identification of the bird in the Ulcinj Salina in May 1982 which, by preceding the first published sightings in Slovenia and Croatia, constitutes the first record of the species in the former Yugoslavian countries. While the rather late records in, particularly, Serbia and Bosnia-Herzegovina as well

as a gap of more than 30 years until the more recent observations in Montenegro since 2013, may derive from the political and economic upheavals after the last Balkan Wars, a total of five sightings of Citrine Wagtail are currently on record for the country.

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## Povzetek

S ciljanim pregledom literature in neobjavljenih virov sem ovrednotil status citronaste pastirice *Motacilla citreola* v Črni gori. Prvo opazovanje je iz maja 1982, ko je skupina britanskih ornitologov pod vodstvom Boba Scotta opazovala en osebek. To je hkrati tudi prvo opazovanje na zahodnem Balkanu. Po več kot tridesetih letih brez novih opazovanj je bila vrsta spet opazovana v Ulcinjskih (maj 2013, marec 2016, november 2017) in Tivatskih solinah (april 2014), skupno je iz Črne gore torej znanih pet podatkov.

## Abstract

For evaluating the current status of Citrine Wagtail *Motacilla citreola* in Montenegro, all available sightings were compiled from published and unpublished personal sources. A hitherto hardly known record of the species for the country by a holiday group of British birdwatchers, under the guidance of renowned ornithologist BOB SCOTT (1938–2009), dates from May 1982. The sighting in the Ulcinj Salina, in 1982, constitutes the first record of Citrine Wagtail in Montenegro and in the Western Balkans. More than 30 years later the species was sighted, between 2013 and 2017, again in the Ulcinj Salina (May 2013, Mar 2016, Nov 2017) and in the former Tivat Salina (Apr 2014). Hence, five observations are currently on record for Montenegro.

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