



Motacilla alba

Common name: **White Wagtail**Latin name: **Motacilla alba**Local name: **أم قيردون**

ECOLOGY

Type:

Wild

Role in Ecosystem:

Adult wagtails have several avian predators, including falcons and hawks (Falconiformes) and owls (Strigiformes). Mammals also take chicks and eggs (and occasionally adults). Common mammalian predators include weasels (Mustelinae), squirrels (Sciruidae), mice (Rodentia), and house cats (Felis domesticus). As insectivores, wagtails affect insect populations throughout their range. They are also hosts to parasitic cuckoos (Cuculidae).

HABITAT

White wagtails breed throughout Eurasia, only being absent in the Arctic. They also breed in the mountains of Morocco and western Alaska. These birds are residents in the milder parts of their range such as western Europe and the Mediterranean, but migratory in much of the rest of their range. Northern European breeders winter around the Mediterranean and in tropical and subtropical Africa, and Asiatic birds move to the Middle East, India, and Southeast Asia. Birds from the North American population also winter in tropical Asia. White wagtails occupy a wide range of habitats but are absent from deserts. The species inhabits a very wide variety of non-forested wet and dry habitats, including seashores, rocky or sandy upland rivers and slow-moving lowland rivers, lakeshores, farmland, gardens, parks and short grassland, such as that found in vicinity of factories in towns and cities. It is also often found in towns and villages.



Food

Carnivore

The species feeds on a wide range of small terrestrial and aquatic invertebrates, as well as fish fry, crumbs and other household scraps.



Movement and Communication

Most populations are regular long-distance migrants, while others are partial migrants or largely resident. In western and southern Europe, some populations of the nominate race and of the subspecies yarrellii are resident, but northern populations of the latter are partial migrants. The call of these birds is a sharp 'chisick' and their song consists of twittering phrases; the males use a series of contact calls to attract the female. In response to nest predators, incubating females will flush when the predator approaches; if the predator is close to the nest she will feign injury or give other displays to draw it away. Young wagtails fledge early if the nest is disturbed, this is presumably a response to decreased nest depredation. Foraging in flocks is also thought to be an adaptation to reduce predation. Pipits and female wagtails also have cryptic plumage



Social Habits

Solitary

The most conspicuous habit of this species is a near-constant tail wagging, a trait that has given the species, and indeed the genus, its common name. Despite the ubiquity of this behaviour, the reasons for it are poorly understood. White wagtails are monogamous and defend breeding territories.



Reproduction

Oviparous

The species is monogamous. It mostly breeds from early April to August, starting later in the north. Both sexes build the nest, which is a rough cup of twigs, grass stems, leaves, rootlets, and mosses, lined with hair, wool, or feathers. It is placed in a hole or crevice in a riverbank, wall, or bridge. White Wagtail also often nests in buildings or even in machinery. Clutches consist of three to eight eggs. Both parents incubate the eggs, although the female generally does so for longer and incubates at night. The eggs begin to hatch after 12-16 days. Both parents feed the chicks until they fledge after between 12 and 15 days, and then continue to feed them for another week after fledging.

Attributes

Size:

16.5 to 19 cm (6.5 to 7.5 in) in length

Weight:

25 g (0.88 oz)

INTRODUCTION

White wagtails breed throughout Eurasia, only being absent in the Arctic. They also breed in the mountains of Morocco and western Alaska. These birds are residents in the milder parts of their range such as western Europe and the Mediterranean, but migratory in much of the rest of their range. White wagtails occupy a wide range of habitats but are absent from deserts. They inhabit grasslands, seashores, rocky shorelines, sand beaches, tidepools, rivers, lakeshores, farmland, gardens, and parks. They are also often found in towns and villages. In the Sudanese culture, it is considered a farmer's friend and does not harm the crops. They are also respectful birds as it is believed that they go for "Haj" every year on the cranes and other big migratory birds to take them to Mecca, performing the Hajj to the Sacred House of God.

LIVELIHOODS AND CULTURE

Human interaction

People who hunt this bird even mistakenly, as the trap should be designed to capture the bird alive, are considered close to non-believers.

Cultural value

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Cultural expression

شدة أم قيردون: Traditional proverb

It means as clever as a wagtail as it is believed it rides .migratory birds to reach the Sacred House of God A traditional song is chanted by the children with different words from region to region but it has the same ideas and .melody which seems to rhyme the bird's tail movement

THREATS

Climate change is thought to affect the timing of migration for this species.

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