

**Northern Wheatear in**

**Centre County, Pennsylvania: On September 17, 1985,**  
while birding at **Bald Eagle State Park,**

I discovered a bird which was unfamiliar to me.

It was about the size of a Song Sparrow and was foraging in a grassy gravel parking lot by the lake's edge. The most distinctive feature of the bird was the white rump and tail which had a broad, dark band extending across the tip and along the central tail feathers forming an inverted "T". The head had a dark stripe through the eye with a light stripe just above it.

The entire upperparts were brown including the wings which did not have any conspicuous markings. The under-parts were cinnamon buff except for the undertail coverts which were white. Its bill was dark, thin and warbler-like. The legs were also dark and seemed long for a bird of its size. The posture of the bird was rather erect.

The bird's behavior was as distinctive as its plumage. It would frequently fly up from the parking lot and land on a cement barrier, which was several inches high, and then fly back onto the gravel. It was constantly flicking its tail upwards. All this movement gave the bird a hyperactive appearance.

The bird was very tame, and I observed it in good lighting from distances as close as five yards. I watched the bird for 15 minutes during which time I took field notes and then examined my field guides confirming the bird as a Northern Wheatear (*Oenanthe oenanthe*).

The bird then flew off. My wife, who is not a birder, was with me at the time and agreed that the bird we saw matched the description in the field guides.

The bird was searched for the next day but could not be found.

The only previous record of Northern Wheatear in Pennsylvania is of a specimen collected October 6, 1919, in Lansdale, Montgomery County (Poole, *Pennsylvania Birds*, 1964). The date of my sighting is consistent with other Wheatear records in the northeast, most of which are between early September and mid-October. Although most Wheatear records are coastal, there have been recent inland records from Maryland, Michigan, New Hampshire, New York, and Ontario (*American Birds*, 1981-85).

- Tom Grow, 622 East Howard Street, Bellfonte, PA 16823

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## Pennsylvania Ornithological Records Committee

### Voting Ballot and tabulation-- Round One

Species: Northern Wheatear    *Oenanthe oenanthe*

Date of Sighting: September 17, 1985

County : Center

Location : Bald Eagle State Park

GPS Coordinates: ~ 41.020708,-77.638178

Observer(s): Tom Grow, Mrs. Grow

Date of Submission: October 10, 2012

Submitted by: Nick Pulcinella

Written Description: from Cassinia V61:84 (1984-1985) Photo: No    Specimen: No    Recording: No

11/26/2012 21:13	Cameron Rutt	Class III - Sight record documented by one observer.	A fabulous written description. It is a shame that great field notes like this are such a rarity nowadays; on the flipside, it's wonderful to be able to accept written documentation for a vagrant some 27 years after the sighting.
11/8/2012 21:52	Drew Weber	Class III - Sight record documented by one observer.	Excellent plumage and behavior description for this species.
12/11/2012 0:36	Ben Coulter	Class III - Sight record documented by one observer.	Good, concise description.
12/16/2012 9:15	Mike Fialkovich	Class III - Sight record documented by one observer.	This is one of the best descriptions I've ever read. It reminds me of the classic descriptions that are in journals from the first half of the 20th century.
12/27/2012 0:12	Devich Farbotnik	Class III - Sight record documented by one observer.	
1/1/2013 13:44	Mike Lanzone	Class III - Sight record documented by one observer.	
2/17/2013 0:51	Dave DeReamus	Class III - Sight record documented by one observer.	I agree with this identification.

Class III-S - 7

Accepted

Signature: NJ Getgood

Date: 2/18/2013