













































646-01-1997

Northern Wheatear (*Oenanthe oenanthe*)  
Juniata County, PA  
7 October 1997  
Nick Pulcinella

DATE: 7 October 1997

LOCATION: Center, Juniata Co., Pennsylvania

WEATHER: Sunny, Temps. 80's wind calm.

OPTICS: 7x42 and 10x40 glasses and 20-60x scope.

OTHER OBSERVERS: Al Guarente.

We located the Northern Wheatear that was staked out at the Amish farm in Center, Juniata Co. We were able to study the bird under good lighting conditions for approximately one hour at distances as close as 15 feet. The bird was active and was observed feeding on the ground among the small rocks in a dirt pathway. He was noted to catch at least one grasshopper while we studied it.

**General Appearance:** Smaller than a robin dark tan above tan to white below with dark primaries and an inverted black "T" on a white tail.

**Head:** Forehead and crown a brownish-tan. Lore black. Ear coverts smudgy dark brown, white eyering, supercillium white,

**Upperparts:** Mantle grayish-brown. Back brown. Lesser coverts gray-white with black centers and gray-white edges. Median coverts mostly brown with some black feathers edged in buffy-white. Allula appeared grayish. Primaries black, secondaries black with some buffy-white tips, tertials mostly brown with some darker tips. Rump white.

**Underparts:** Chin, throat and upper breast a brownish-tan. Lower breast and belly a paler whiter-tan. Under tail coverts light brownish-tan.

**Tail:** Seen mostly closed but appeared mostly white with black feathers and when flying the black feathers showed an inverted "T" design. The black "T" was apparent in the lower third of the tail.

**Bare Parts:** Bill dark, eye large and black, legs black.

**Voice:** Not heard.

**Elimination of similar species:** The similar Isabelline Wheatear (*Oenanthe isabellina*) was eliminated by the combination of the following field marks that are found on the Isabelline: a white supercillium that is apparent from the lore to the eye and not behind the eye; less contrasting ear coverts; less contrast between the back color and the rest of the bird; a more conspicuous and darker allula. Other features that separate the two species such as posture and primary projection, I was unable to appreciate.

**Race:** With the darker brownish-tan appearance to the overall color of the bird, I feel it is of the Greenland race *leucorhoa*. I believe the bird is probably an immature male because of the dark ear coverts, but because there is so much variability within females and immature of the species I can't be certain of the age.

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210 Welcome Avenue  
Norwood, PA 19074

cc: File  
PORC w/photo.  
Deuane Hoffman - PA Birds county compiler  
George Hall w/photo - Field Notes Regional compiler

646-01-1997

Steven Feldstein, 10:32 AM 10/7/97 , Northern Wheatear

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Return-Path: <server@ark.ship.edu>  
Delivered-To: pabirds@redrose.net  
Resent-date: Tue, 07 Oct 1997 10:34 -0400 (EDT)  
Date: Tue, 07 Oct 1997 10:32:29 -0400 (EDT)  
From: Steven Feldstein <sbf@essc.psu.edu>  
Subject: Northern Wheatear  
Sender: server@ark.ship.edu  
Resent-to: pabirds@redrose.net  
To: pabirds@ark.ship.edu  
Cc: sbf@essc.psu.edu  
X-Listprocessor-version: 8.0 -- ListProcessor(tm) by CREN

Yesterday afternoon, I went with Randy Harrison and Gene Zielinski to see the Northern Wheatear in Juniata County. We had excellent prolonged views of the bird, so we were fortunate enough to be able to study it in detail (we will submit detailed written documentation to PORC, and I encourage others to do so too).

I'd like to make some additional comments on the field identification of this bird. Firstly, its breast, sides, and flanks were a fairly bright buffy orange, contrasting noticeably with its whitish belly and undertail coverts. This suggests that the bird is of the expected subspecies, leucorhoa, which nests in Labrador, eastern Arctic Canada, Greenland, and Iceland. Secondly, the bird lacked the obvious black mask of an adult male, so it is most likely an adult female or an immature. It did have grayish ear coverts, black lores, and a bright white supercilium (brighter behind the eye). This leads me to guess that it might be an immature male. However, there seems to be substantially intraspecific variability within this species so that determination of age and sex is probably not possible. Nevertheless, I'll try to find additional information on aging and sexing leucorhoa. I'd also be really interested in hearing other persons comments on the subspecies, age, and sex of this bird.

We also put some effort in making sure that the bird was not an Isabelline Wheatear. For those persons not familiar with that species, Isabelline Wheatear very much resembles adult female/immature Northern Wheatear. Isabelline Wheatear nests in southeast Europe, the Middle East, and southcentral Asia. It does exhibit long distance vagrancy as there are records from as far away as Great Britain and Japan. Given the occurrence of fall records in Great Britain, it would seem extraordinarily unlikely, but not impossible, for this species to show up in eastern North America. Following the MacMillan Bird Guide to Europe and the Middle East, which presents plenty of details for separating Northern and Isabelline Wheatear, we were able to positively identify the bird as a Northern Wheatear from the following field marks: 1) The primary extension was about 1.25 times the length of the tertials (the primary extension is less than or equal to the tertial length in Isabelline Wheatear), 2) The far tip of the primaries extended beyond the tip of the undertail coverts (the primaries are shorter in Isabelline Wheatear), 3) the stem of the black "T" on the tail was about the same length as the black terminal band (it is usually noticeably shorter on Isabelline Wheatear), 4) the alula was only slightly darker than the various wing coverts (it is usually much darker on Isabelline Wheatear). Two more subjective field marks are, given that I don't have much experience with these species (I saw about 10 Northern Wheatears in Tanzania in 1987, all probably being the nominate subspecies oenanthe, and just one Isabelline Wheatear in Israel in 1985) are, 5) the legs did not appear noticeably long (the legs are longer on Isabelline Wheatear), 6) its posture was quite horizontal, not being more upright as in Isabelline Wheatear.

I sure hope that the Northern Wheatear sticks around for several more days (it was first found on Saturday), so that lots more birders can see this wonderful bird.

Steven Feldstein

**Pennsylvania Ornithological Records Committee**

**Voting Tabulation - Round One**

Species: Northern Wheatear (*Oenanthe oenanthe*)

Date of Sighting: 4 October 1998 to 7 October 1998

Location: WALKER TOWNSHIP

County: JUNIATA

Observer(s): Steven Feldstein, Randy Harrison, Gene Zielinski, Nick Pulcinella

Al Guarente, Frank Haas, John Fedak

Date of Submission: 1998

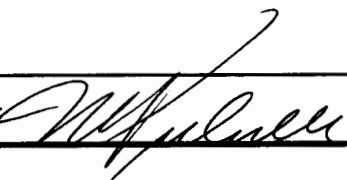
Submitted by: Steven Feldstein, Nick Pulcinella, Frank Haas, John Fedak

WRITTEN DESCRIPTION YES PHOTO YES SPECIMEN NO RECORDING NO

Member	Class I	Class II	Class III	Class IV-A				Abstain
					Class IV-B	Class IV-C	Class V	
D. Couchman	X							
T. Floyd								X
P. Hess	X							
R. Ickes	X							
J. McWilliams	X							
B. Reid	X							
P. Rodewald	X							
TOTALS	6							1
DECISION	X							

Comments: 6/0/1

Signature (Secretary):



Date:

6/14/01