

GRAY WAGTAIL (*MOTACILLA CINEREA*): A NEW SPECIES FOR BRITISH COLUMBIA

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Carmanah Point Lightstation, 25 Huron Street, Victoria, BC. V8V 4V9

The Gray Wagtail (*Motacilla cinerea*) is an Old World species that breeds from the British Isles, southern Scandinavia, central Russia and central Siberia south to northwestern Africa, the Mediterranean region, Asia Minor, Iran, the Himalayas, northern Mongolia, Manchuria, northern Korea, and Japan. It generally winters south of its summer range to central Africa, Sri Lanka, and western New Guinea. In North America it is mainly a casual spring migrant through the Commander and western Aleutians and Pribilof and St. Lawrence islands in Alaska. Elsewhere it is considered accidental (American Ornithologist's Union 1998).

On 26 October 2004, at 1600 hrs., we spotted a yellow-bellied bird on a small gravel beach on the southeast side of Carmanah Point Lightstation on southwestern Vancouver Island (48° 36' 52" N, 124° 45' 37" W). The bird was frequently wagging its tail as it vigorously fed on a huge hatch of kelp flies and smaller midges along the tide line. We watched the bird for about 10 min before it flew, with a strong direct flight, into a nearby Sitka spruce (*Picea sitchensis*) tree. We returned to the lightstation to complete a weather report. In the meantime, we identified the yellow-coloured wagtail, using the National Geographic Field Guide to the

Birds of North America, as a Gray Wagtail.

Forty-five min later we returned to the beach to find the bird feeding in the same area. The wagtail walked and snapped insects off the rocks continuing to wag its tail between feeding events. At one point it preened for several minutes. A series of photographs documenting the occurrence were obtained using a digital Nikon Coolpix 4200 camera pressed against a spotting telescope as the bird continued to feed. These images have been catalogued as B C Photo 3059 (Figure 1) and deposited in the scientific photo files at the Biodiversity Centre for Wildlife Studies in Victoria (see Campbell and Stirling 1971).

The Gray Wagtail is an exceedingly rare bird to find in western North America south of western Alaska. Small (1994) lists a single record for California of an immature bird that was present at the mouth of the Salinas River on 9 and 10 October 1988. There are no satisfactory occurrences from the Yukon Territory prior to 2003 (Sinclair et al. 2003), British Columbia prior to 26 October 2004 (Campbell et al. 1997; R. W. Campbell pers. comm.), and Oregon prior to January 1997 (Russell 1997).



Figure 1. Gray Wagtail, Carmanah Point, BC. 26 October 2004 (Jerry Etzkorn). B C Photo 3059.

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About the Authors

Since 1979 Jerry and Janet have been lightkeepers along the British Columbia coast enjoying the last 18 years at Carmanah Point. Both have supported various provincial research and monitoring programs and were regular contributors to The Birds of British Columbia. Jerry has a B.Sc. in biology from Simon Fraser University and Janet is a graduate in Forest Technology from the British Columbia Institute of Technology.