

## **Western Yellow Wagtail** *Motacilla flava flavissima*

(Breeds most of temperate Europe and Asia. Resident in the milder parts of its range in western Europe but northern and eastern populations migrate to Africa and south Asia. All records below relate to the British race *Motacilla flava flavissima*).

The first note of this species occurrence in Northern Ireland is by Templeton who noted two male birds on the shore of Ram's Island, County Antrim on the 3rd June 1812. *Thompson* 1851.

In Thompson's time the Yellow Wagtail was not uncommon around the Lough Neagh basin and he recounts two visits to this area; on one occasion at Toomebridge, County Londonderry in August 1846, he observed up to 10 birds and on a second visit in May 1850 to Derrywarragh Island, County Armagh no less than 40 birds were seen. The previous year, the G. Robinson had noted birds nearby at Miltown and Maghera. *Thompson* 1851.

A trip by Belfast Naturalists' Field Club on 16th June 1906 produced several birds at Arboe, County Tyrone. *Anon.* in *Irish Naturalist* 1906. In June 1909 birds were noted at Derryaad, County Armagh. *Anon.* in *Irish Naturalist* 1909.

Collecting appears to have sealed the fate of this species and specimens in the collection at the Ulster Museum are testament to the insatiable appetite of some so-called naturalists.

Specimens of Yellow Wagtail taken in County Armagh in the Ulster Museum; males Lurgan 27th May 1907, Lough Neagh 30th May 1907, Lurgan 29th April 1915, Lurgan 2nd May 1917, 2nd May 1927 with a female at Lough Neagh on 2nd May 1917

By 1944, however the species appeared to have abandoned its former breeding grounds. Arnold Benington recounts the following.

*"Between 1922 and 1930 I could always count on finding several nests during a visit.... In 1930, I found three nests in the space of one acre - all under dead branches of whin.... From that time the birds began to desert the place and for the last 3 or 4 nesting seasons I have not seen one example in Northern Ireland ... During May and June 1944, I cycled, rowed, walked and waded many miles over the old breeding grounds but did not hear or see one single bird ...". Benington 1945.*

Breeding apparently took place at Lough Beg, County Londonderry in 1941. *Deane* 1954.

Breeding also took place during 1957 when a pair bred on the West Twin, Belfast Harbour, County Antrim [Down?]. *Ruttledge* 1958.

In 1958, breeding took place in County Antrim when three pairs bred near Larne, County Antrim. *USPB Bull.* No.1.

In 1967 a male was at Lough Beg, County Londonderry, 19th May with another or perhaps the same on 4th June (Willie McDowell). In 1968 a pair was suspected of breeding at Lough Beg, County Londonderry (Willie McDowell). *Ruttledge* 1969.

Since that date, no further incidences of breeding or suspected breeding have been recorded.

Prior to 1951, records away from the breeding areas are almost non-existent though Thompson noted birds at Belfast Lough and *Ussher & Warren* 1900 mention two records from western Tyrone.

### **1951**

One: Dundrum, County Down, 2nd September. *Deane* 1954.

### **1952**

One: Ballyferris, County Down, 17th May. *Deane* 1954.

### **1953**

One: Waterbridge, Banbridge, County Down, 14th June. *Furphy* 1955.

### **1954**

One: Ballyferris, County Down, 1st May. *Ruttledge* 1955.

## 1955

Four: Duncrue Street marsh, County Antrim; singles 18th May, 29th June, 25th July and 29th September. *Ruttledge 1956.*

## 1956

One: Ballyferris, County Down, 6th May. *Ruttledge 1957.*

One: Copeland Bird Observatory, County Down, 25th May. *Ruttledge 1957.*

## 1957

Three: Kinnegar, Holywood, County Down, 16th September. *Ruttledge 1958.*

One: Ballyferris, County Down, 28th April. *Ruttledge 1958.*

Two: River Bann, near Banbridge, County Down, 27th September. *Ruttledge 1958.*

## 1958

Three: Copeland Bird Observatory, County Down; one male 5th May and single females 9th May and 18th May. *Ruttledge 1959.*

Two: Belfast Lough3 [no county]; singles 6th and 21st September. *Ruttledge 1959.*

## 1960

One: Copeland Bird Observatory, County Down, 13th May. *Ruttledge 1961.*

## 1961

Three: Duncrue Street marsh, County Antrim; one 18th April with two 30th April. *Ruttledge 1962.*

One: Rathlin Island, County Antrim, 12th May. *Ruttledge 1962.*

## 1962

One: Loughbrickland, County Down, 30th June. *Ruttledge 1963.*

## 1964

One: Copeland Bird Observatory, Lighthouse Island, Copeland Islands, County Down, 16th May, *Ruttledge 1965.*

## 1966

Two: Copeland Bird Observatory, Lighthouse Island, Copeland Islands, County Down; singles 13th May and 10th September. *Copeland Bird Report 1966.*

## 1969

One: Kinnegar, Holywood, County Down, August (*pers. obs.*)

## 1970

One: Copeland Bird Observatory, Lighthouse Island, Copeland Islands, County Down, 3rd May. *Acheson 1986.*

## c1972

One: Male. Ballycarry, Larne, County Antrim. *NIBRC 59/1972.*

## 1977

One: Aughanlig, County Armagh, 3rd November. *AFNS Report 1977.*

## 1979

One: Redlands, Larne, County Antrim, 3rd May. *NIBRC 188/1979.*

### **1983**

Four: Larne, County Antrim 7th May. *NIBRC* 1987.

One: St. John's Point, Killough, County Down, 29th May. *NIBRC* 1987.

One, Ballintoy, County Antrim 6th June. *NIBRC* 376/1983. [recorded as 1994 in *NIBRC* 1987].

### **1984**

Two: Torr Head, County Antrim, 7th May. *NIBRC* 1987.

### **1985**

One: Bog Meadows, Belfast County Antrim, 27th April. *NIBRC* 1987.

One: Belfast Harbour Estate, County Down, 5th May. *NIBRC* 1987.

### **1988**

One: Brigg's Rocks, Groomsport, County Down, 5th May. *NIBA* 1992.

### **1989**

Three: One: Copeland Bird Observatory, Lighthouse Island, Copeland Islands, County Down; singles 30th April, 6th May and 7th May. *Stewart* 1990.

### **1992**

Two: Lough Beg NNR, County Londonderry, 22nd - 23rd April. *NIBA* 1993.

### **1993**

Two: Copeland Bird Observatory, Lighthouse Island, Copeland Islands, County Down; singles 8th and 20th May. *NIBA* 1994.

### **1996**

Three: Belfast Harbour Estate, Belfast, County Down; single birds recorded 24th to 26th April, 7th June [a female] and 22nd June (Anthony McGeehan, Willie McDowell, Dave Allen *et al.*). *Charles and Crory* 2019.

One: Kinturk Flat, Lough Neagh, Ardboe, County Tyrone, 12th May (C. Coney, B. McKeown). *Charles and Crory* 2019.

One: Donnybrewer, Lough Foyle, County Londonderry, 23rd May (Matthew Tickner). *Charles and Crory* 2019.

### **1998**

Four: Copeland Bird Observatory, Lighthouse Island, Copeland Islands, County Down: one 30th April with two [one male and one female] 9th May, these birds were joined by a new male later that same day one male remaining to 10th May (Neville McKee *et al.*). *Copeland Bird Report* 1998.

One: RSPB Reserve, Belfast Harbour Estate, Belfast, County Down, 31st August (Dave Allen). *NIBA* 2000.

One: Kinturk Flat, Lough Neagh, County Tyrone, 9th September (David Knight). *NIBA* 2000.

One: Grey Point, Belfast Lough, Crawfordsburn, County Down, 12th September (Walter Veale). *NIBA* 2000.

### **1999**

One: Whitehouse Lagoon, Belfast Lough, County Antrim, 17th May (Chris Murphy). *NIBA* 2001.

One: Ballintoy, County Antrim, 12th June (Colin Guy). *NIBA* 2001.

One: Rathlin Island, County Antrim, 22nd October (Davy Hunter). *NIBA* 2001.

One: Lough Beg NNR, County Londonderry, 14th November (David Steele). *NIBA* 2001.

### **2000**

Two: Briggs Rocks, Groomsport, County Down; one male 22nd – 23rd April joined by a female on 23rd April. *NIBA* 2002.

## 2001

One: Adult male. Belfast Lough RSPB Reserve, Belfast Harbour Estate, Belfast, County Down, 12th- 13th June. *NIBA* 2003.

One: Flyover. Portrush, County Antrim, 6th October. *NIBA* 2003.

## 2002

One: Flyover. Big Copeland, Copeland Islands, County Down, 9th June. *NIBA* 2004.

One: Ardmore, County Armagh, 12th July. *NIBA* 2004.

Two: Mullagh, Lough Beg, County Londonderry; singles 19th September and 14th October [first-winter]. *NIBA* 2004.

## 2003

Two: Males. Copeland Bird Observatory, Lighthouse Island, Copeland Islands, County Down, 3rd May one remaining to 4th May. *CBO BIRD REPORT* 2003.

One: Runkerry Point, Ardihannon, County Antrim, 20th May (Colin Guy). *Charles and Crory* 2019.

One: Male. Whitehead, County Antrim, 3rd October. *NIBA* 2006.

## 2004

One: Heard in flight. Portrush, County Antrim, 6th June. *NIBA* 2006.

## 2005

One: Dunseverick, County Antrim, 26th June (Colin Guy). *NIBA* 2008a

## 2006

One: Ardboe, County Tyrone, 25th May (Declan Coney). *NIBA* 2008a

Two: Lough Beg NNR, County Londonderry; singles 29th April and 1st October (David Steele). *NIBA* 2008a

One: Belfast Lough RSPB Reserve, Belfast Harbour Estate, Belfast, County Down, 15th May (Anthony McGeehan). *NIBA* 2008a.

## 2008

One: Female. Strand Lough, Killough, County Down, 26th April (Richard Weyl). *NIBA* 2008b.

One: Male. Ballyquintin Point, Outer Ards Peninsula, 1st – 2nd May (Richard Hunter). *NIBA* 2008b

## 2010

One: The Giants Causeway, Bushmills, County Antrim, 20th May (Irishbirding). *Charles and Crory* 2019.

One: Male [present for 30 minutes] Dundrum Inner Bay North, Newcastle, County Down, 26th June (Andrew Crory, Ed McGuigan). *Charles and Crory* 2019.

One: Kiltagh Point, Lough Neagh, Ardboe, County Tyrone, 14th October (Colm Coney). *Charles and Crory* 2019.

## 2011

One: Female. Portavogie, County Down, 1st May (Richard Wyle). *Charles and Crory* 2019.

One: Female. Coney Island, Killough, County Down, 3rd May (Chris Murphy, Tim Murphy). *Charles and Crory* 2019.

## 2012

One: Ballintoy Harbour, Ballintoy, County Antrim, 25th July (Colin Guy). *Charles and Crory* 2019.

## 2013

One: Male. Rathlin Island, County Antrim, 20th April (Neal Warnock). *Charles and Crory* 2019.

One: Male. Lough Beg NNR, County Londonderry, 21st April (David Steele). *Charles and Crory* 2019.

Two: Belfast Lough RSPB Reserve, Belfast Harbour Estate, Belfast County Down; single males 24th - 25th April and 3rd - 4th May (Nicky Lynn, Chris Sturgeon, Ronald Surgenor, Gerard McGeehan *et al.*). *Charles and Crory* 2019.

One: Male. Portmore Lough RSPB Reserve, Aghagallon, County Antrim, 27th April (Gerard McGeehan, Shirley Dunlop, Derek Charles, Mark Killops). *Charles and Crory* 2019.

One: Copeland Bird Observatory, Lighthouse Island, Copeland Islands, County Down, 5th May (Ian Humphreys). *Charles and Crory* 2019.

One: Male, in song. Cabragh Road, Tandragee, County Armagh, 21st - 22nd June (David Knight *et al.*). *Charles and Crory* 2019.

One: Briggs Rocks, Groomsport, County Down, 3rd August (Colin Guy). *Charles and Crory* 2019.

## 2014

One: Male. Discovery Centre, Oxford Island NNR, Lurgan, County Armagh, 20th - 21st April (Ed O'Hara *et al.*). *Charles and Crory* 2019.

One: Martins Lane, Newry, County Down, 26th September (Frank Carrol). *Charles and Crory* 2019.

## 2015

One: Lough Beg NNR, County Londonderry, 18th September (David Steele). *Charles and Crory* 2019.

## 2016

One: Female. 0.1 kilometers north of Kearney Village, Outer Ards Peninsula, County Down, 8th May (Richard Weyl). *Charles and Crory* 2019.

One: Female. Ardmore, Lough Neagh, Derrytrasna, County Armagh, 10th May (Derek Charles) *Charles and Crory* 2019.

## 2017

One: Rathlin Island, County Antrim, 11th May (Ric Else, Hazel Watson). *Charles and Crory* 2019.

## 2018

One: Mullagh, Lough Beg NNR, County Londonderry, 11th October (David Steele). *Charles and Crory* 2019.

## 2019

One: Ballykelly, Lough Foyle, County Londonderry, 15th September (Chris Murphy *et al.*). Record not published.



Western Yellow Wagtail, *Motacilla flava flavissima*,  
Discovery Centre, Oxford Island NNR, Lurgan, 20th April 2014. Photo courtesy of Derek Charles.