

# First record of Isabelline Wheatear *Oenanthe isabellina* in Thailand

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While driving with our Thai guide Sukanya Thanombuddha along the main road in Kaeng Krachan National Park, Phetchaburi province, Thailand (12°57'N 99°23'E) at around 17h20 on 25 March 2003, we noticed a small passerine on the gravel road in a relatively open area of forest, approximately at km 21.5 and 680 m elevation. The bird landed on a bush near the road, where it sat in the open for a few minutes. It returned to the road where we observed it closely in good light through 10x binoculars and a 32x telescope, and made some video recordings. We watched it for a total of c.20 minutes and identified it as an Isabelline Wheatear *O. isabellina*. The record has been accepted by the Records Committee of the Bird Conservation Society of Thailand.

The bird was wheatear-sized, with an upright stance and long legs. The upperparts were sandy-brown, with uniformly buff wing-coverts, contrasting blackish alula and broad pale fringes to greater coverts and tertials. The supercilium was whitish in front of and above the eye, and there was a well-defined black loreal stripe. The ear-coverts were pale buff. The underparts were pale off-white, apart from the sides of the breast which were pale ochre. When flushed it showed a white rump with a black inverse 'T' on the tail, formed by black central tail feathers and an extensive black terminal tail-bar. This terminal bar extended further up the tail than in Northern Wheatear *Oenanthe oenanthe*, but less than in Desert Wheatear *O. deserti*. Apart from ST, all observers had previous field experience of several species of wheatear, including Northern Wheatear, Isabelline Wheatear and Desert Wheatear. Apart from these three

species, no other wheatears recorded in Asia have a combination of sandy-brown upperparts and the black 'T' on a white tail.

About a dozen species of wheatear breed or have been recorded in Asia. Nine of these have been recorded in the Indian subcontinent, but none occurs regularly east of north-west India (Grimmett *et al.* 1998). Only Isabelline Wheatear has previously been recorded in South-East Asia, in Myanmar (Robson 2000). Our record is the first for Thailand and apparently only the second for South-East Asia. This species breeds from eastern Greece, over much of temperate and subtropical Palearctic, east to central China. It normally winters in the Sahel zone in Africa, south to Kenya, over the Arabian peninsula, east to north-west India (Cramp 1988). In view of the fact that the breeding range extends much further east than the wintering grounds, it may seem surprising that there have not been more records in South-East Asia. However, this may be related to the rather arid habitats that this species prefers, which are very limited in occurrence in the region.

## REFERENCES

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