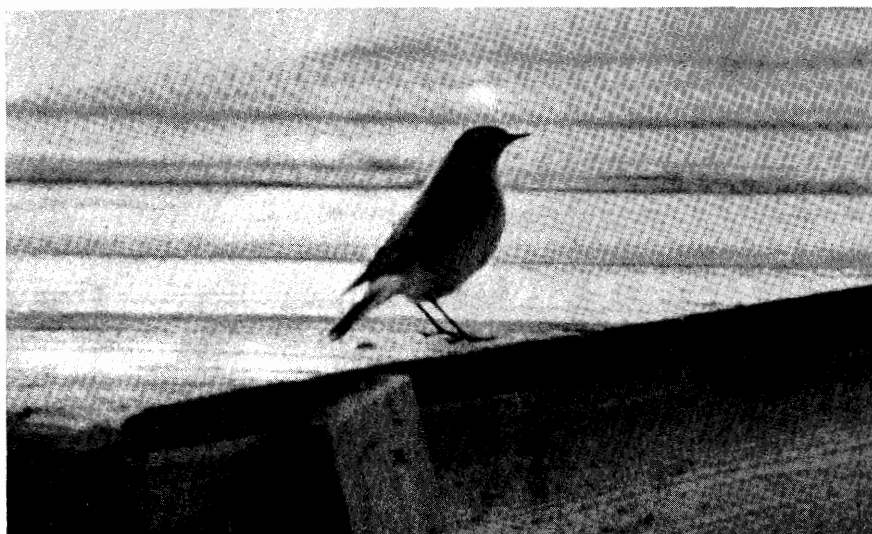




*"Greenland" Wheatear (Oenanthe oenanthe leucorrhoa) photographed at Westhampton, Long Island, New York, October 16, 1977.
— Photo by Bertel Bruun*

PHOTOGRAPHS OF NEW YORK STATE RARITIES

40. WHEATEAR

BERTEL BRUUN

From October 16, 1977 to October 23 a Wheatear visited my garden in Westhampton, Suffolk County. On the weekends of this time period I photographed the bird.

The Wheatear (*Oenanthe oenanthe*) is an Old World species that has invaded North America from both east and west, in both cases retaining its original wintering grounds in the tropics of Africa and Asia. It is therefore only a rare visitor to North America south of its breeding grounds and does not occur at all in South America.

The presence of Wheatears in Greenland has been known since the 18th century (Brünnich, 1764; Egede, 1741) but the first record from the North American continent did not occur until the middle of the 19th century. Cassin (1856) described a bird, *Saxicola oenanthoides*, obtained at "Nova Scotia" (actually Cape Harrison, Labrador), which was a Wheatear (Baird, Brewer and Ridgway). Coues (1861) next mentions the species which he came across on his visit to Henley Harbour, Labrador, and he later described it as "astray from Europe via Greenland" (Coues, 1872). It is now known to breed commonly in northeastern Canada as well as in Greenland and Iceland. This population is separated as a distinct subspecies, the "Greenland" Wheatear (*O. o. leucorrhoa*). That the eastern North American population belonged to this subspecies was demonstrated by Stejneger (1901). The retention of the African winter quarters necessitating a biannual transatlantic crossing has been proven beyond doubt (Bruun, Salomonsen, Snow).

The first record of the species from the United States is from New York. There are now a total of 19 records from this state. These are listed below:

1. Long Island, fall of 1863, adult female (Elliot collection), A.M.N.H. collection No. 1236 (Bull, 1964).
2. Junius, Seneca Co., Sept. 9, 1872 (Hampton), specimen in Hobart College collection (Bull, 1974).
3. Jamaica, Queens Co., 1885, two adult females (Akhurst) A.M.N.H. collections No. 439561 and 439562 (Bull, 1964).
4. Rochester, Monroe Co., Sept. 30-Oct. 1, 1934, one (Bull, 1974).
5. Montauk, Suffolk Co., Dec. 27, 1936, one with flock of 50 Snow Buntings (Bull, 1964).

6. Moriches Inlet, Suffolk Co., June 3, 1941, one in breeding plumage (Bull, 1964).
7. Peekskill, Westchester Co., Nov. 15, 1947, one (Bull, 1964).
8. Glen Oaks Village, Queens Co., Sept. 9-16, 1951, one which perched on boulders and even rooftops (Bull, 1964).
9. Orient, Suffolk Co., May 13, 1956, one (Bull, 1964).
10. Piseco Lake, Hamilton Co., Sept. 25, 1963, one (Bull, 1974).
11. Grand Island, Niagara Co., Sept. 25, 1965, one (Bull, 1974).
12. Tobay Sanctuary, Nassau Co., Sept. 18, 1967, one (*Kingbird* 18: 26, 1968).
13. Hamburg, Erie Co., Sept. 27, 1967, two (Bull, 1974).
14. VanCortlandt Park, Bronx Co., June 8, 1968, one (Bull, 1970).
15. Upton, Suffolk Co., Sept. 28, 1970, one (Bull, 1974).
16. Bridgeport, Madison Co., Sept. 26-27, 1972, one (*Am. Birds* 27: 34, 1973).
17. Captree State Park, Suffolk Co., Sept. 23-28, 1976, one (*Am. Birds* 31: 159, 1977).
18. Westhampton, Suffolk Co., Oct. 16-23, 1977, one (Bruun, 1980).
19. Robert Moses State Park, Suffolk Co., Oct. 19-20, 1978, one (*Am. Birds* 33: 162, 1979).

The four known specimens from New York are all of the "Greenland" Wheatear as is the Westhampton bird and there is no reason to believe the nominate race has ever occurred in New York (Bruun, 1980).

It has been postulated (Peterson), that the Wheatear is increasing in the northeast. Although this may be true on the breeding grounds (Salomonsen, 1967), there is no evidence this is true in New York. The table compares the New York records of Wheatears from the last five decades with the membership of the National Audubon Society at the middle of each decade as an indicator of the relative number of observers. Although records have increased, this appears due to an increase in observers and not in the number of birds or changes in their migratory habits.

	<u>1930-1939</u>	<u>1940-1949</u>	<u>1950-1959</u>	<u>1960-1969</u>	<u>1970-1979</u>
Wheatears	2	2	2	5	5
Members of the Nat. Aud. Soc. in 5th year of decade*	4280	10,250	32,930	45,100	332,035

* These figures were kindly supplied by Ms. Michelle Epstein of the National Audubon Society.

The Wheatear remains a rare fall vagrant and even rarer and more irregular spring vagrant to New York as well as the rest of eastern North America.

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