its acceptance was disputed by van der Laan (1992) and Scharringa & Wassink (1992). The 1989 record was recently revised by the Dutch rarities committee (CDNA) and was still found acceptable as the first for the Netherlands. The experience with largely similar observation conditions of the 1996 record compared with the 1989 record influenced this decision.

On 16 July 1997, an adult bird was seen at Wagejot, Texel, Noord-Holland. On 16 and 23-26 July 1997, an adult was present along Oostvaardersdijk, on the same spot where the 1996 bird had been staying. On 3 August 1997, an adult was present near Julianadorp, Noord-Holland. If accepted, these would be the third to fifth record. The bird at Oostvaardersdijk, however, might have been the returning bird of 1996.

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Influx of Isabelline Wheatear in Sicily in spring 1996

Isabelline Wheatear *Oenanthe isabellina* breeds in Bulgaria, northern Greece, Turkey, the Middle East (Iran, Iraq (probably), Israel, Jordan, Lebanon and Syria), the Caucasus region and south-eastern Russia, east to north-eastern China, and southern Siberia. It has also bred occasionally in Romania (at least in 1975 and 1978) (Cramp 1988, Corso 1994, Mitchell & Young 1997).

In the Western Palearctic, outside the breeding and regular passage range, it is a very rare vagrant which has at least been recorded in Britain (10), Canary Islands (1), Denmark (1), Finland (7), France (6), Hungary (2), Ireland (1), the Netherlands (1), Norway (1), Poland (2), Sweden (3) and Ukraine (5) (Cramp 1988, Corso 1994, Gantlett 1994, 1995, Dijksman & Maas 1997). So, the total number of extralimital records in this region is only c 39, the first of which was in November 1887 in Britain. The best months are September (9 records) and October (9), followed by April (7); the best years were 1977, 1984 and 1994 (4 records), followed by 1988, 1990 and 1993 (3).

In Italy, Isabelline Wheatear is a scarce but regular passage migrant with 191 records up to 1995, most of which from Sicily (183, 175 of these in south-eastern Sicily), and others from southern Italy (5), central Italy (2) and northern Italy (1); the first record was in 1971 on Capri Island. The record total in one year sofar was 59 during spring 1995 in south-eastern Sicily (Corso 1995, Corso in press). In contrast to the European extralimital records, there are only four autumn records; all others are from late February to early April.

TABLE 1 Characteristics of influx of Isabelline Wheatear / Izabeltapuit *Oenanthe isabellina* in Sicily, Italy, in March 1996

Total number of observations		118
Total number of individuals		81 (+2 dead)
Average number of observations per day (18 dates)		6.5 (min-max 1-24)
Average number of individuals per day (10 dates)		8.1 (min-max 1-23)
Maximum presence		28 days
Occurrence of individuals in three		
10-day periods in March	1st	63 (77.7 %)
	2nd	16 (19.7%)
	3rd	2 (2.4%)
Distance from sea	'0 m'	(98.0 %)
	10 km	(2.0 %)
Foraging	on sandy beach	(10.6 %)
	on rock coast	(89.8 %)

Influx of Isabelline Wheatear in Sicily in spring 1996

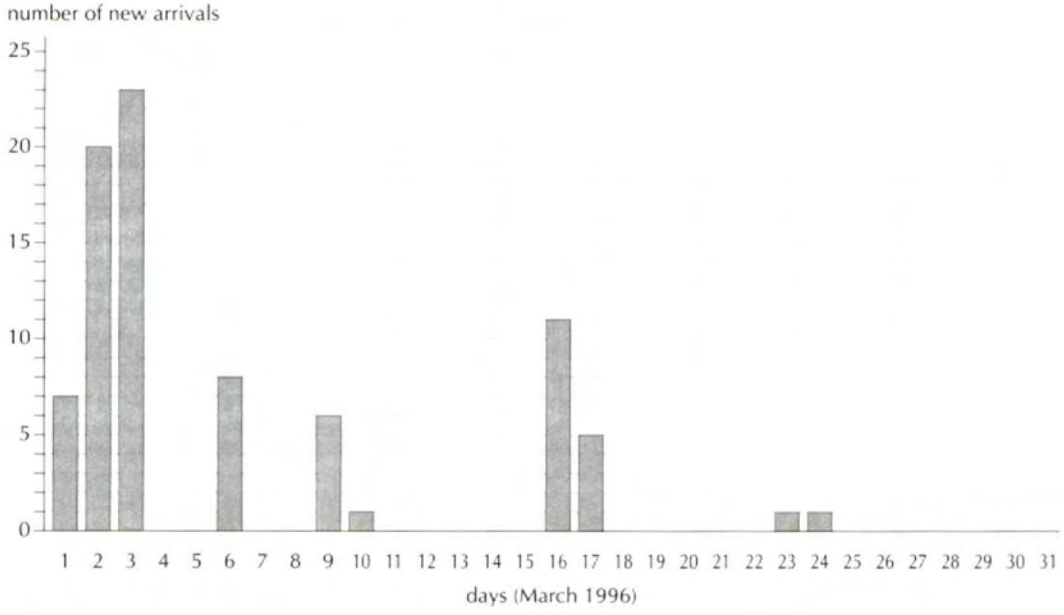

FIGURE 1 Numbers of individuals occurring during influx of Isabelline Wheatear / Izabeltapuit *Oenanthe isabellina* in southern Sicily, Italy, in March 1996

In March 1996, an astonishing number of 83 Isabelline Wheatears was recorded in Sicily. During this period many data were collected, the most significant of which are presented in table 1. The influx was preceded by strong winds from the south-west, characterized by the presence of typical red desert sands. The area affected by the influx was the coastal region of south-eastern Sicily, from the area just south of Catania (four records) to the extreme south-eastern area near Pachino (nine records), with the remaining records roughly in between Siracusa and Pachino. The first birds arrived on 1 March. There were three peaks in occurrence: 2 March with 20 individuals, 3 March with 23 (20 of which together in a single area) and 16 March with 11 (figure 1). The last bird arrived in the area on 24 March, while the last bird observed remained in the area until 29 March. The actual number of birds involved was 81 on 10 dates (plus two found dead), with an average of 8.1 birds per day. Interestingly, contrary to all other years, three birds remained in the area for 20, 25 and 28 days, respectively, while the previous longest stay was only three days; in table 1, some further data are shown.

Nearly all the birds were observed along the sea coast, with only 2% at 10 km inland. More birds than in all other years were recorded in southern parts of the area involved, far from Siracusa, where most birds were observed in the previous years. As a rule, the birds were observed in open areas, with 85% of the birds in vegetation with a height between 5 cm and 1 m, and 15% in vegetation between 1 m and 3 m. With regard to the habitat choice for foraging, 89.8% of the birds used the rock coast, hunting on rocks or around the lower vegetation, while only 10.6% used the beach, catching prey running on the sand. The habitat selected is typical of the species (Cramp 1988), but there are no specific references to the foraging habitats used, most of the available literature dealing only with hunting methods and foraging behaviour.

In conclusion, the spring 1996 passage represents the largest influx of Isabelline Wheatear into Italy.

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Head pattern of Blyth's Pipit

The photographs of the Blyth's Pipit *Anthus godlewskii* on Helgoland, Schleswig-Holstein, Germany, in September 1996 (Birding World 9: 403, 1996, 10: 28, 1997; Dutch Birding 18: 264, plate 246-247, 1996; Limicola 10: 333, 1996, 11: 107, 112, 118, 1997; Ornithol Jahresber Helgoland 7: 44-45, 1997) are surely the best of this species ever published. They illustrate clearly some of the features that are generally considered diagnostic for the species in autumn: the 'small-pipit'-like impression, the short and fine-tipped bill, the short tail, relative to the length of the tertials, and the shape of the dark centres to the moulted inner median coverts.

During recent research on the species, in preparation for some illustrations, I found one

FIGURE 1 Typical head pattern of Blyth's Pipit / Mongoolse Pieper *Anthus godlewskii* (left) and Richard's Pipit / Grote Pieper *A richardi (Brian Small)*. Note short pointed bill and weak supercilium in front and behind eye in Blyth's; and stronger bill and broad supercilium, sometimes streaked lightly at rear, in Richard's