

## THE SPRAGUE'S PIPIT REACHES CALIFORNIA

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On 19 October 1974 a party of us flushed a Sprague's Pipit (*Anthus spragueii*) from a cutover alfalfa field in the Tijuana River Valley just south of Imperial Beach, San Diego County, California. Additional searching of this field on the 19th revealed at least three Sprague's Pipits, and continued checking of the area during the next two weeks indicated one or two individuals were present through 27 October. On 24 October I collected an adult female weighing 20.3 g from the field, and it is now No. 38980 in the San Diego Natural History Museum.

Other birds present in the alfalfa field were some 250 Water Pipits (*A. spinoletta*), up to six Red-throated Pipits (*A. cervinus*), about 50 Savannah Sparrows (*Passerculus sandwichensis*), at least one Vesper Sparrow (*Pooecetes gramineus*) and a half dozen Chestnut-collared Longspurs (*Calcarius ornatus*). The Water and Red-throated pipits remained as a flock in areas where the alfalfa was shortest, but the Sprague's Pipits usually remained apart and alone in areas of taller plants. A Sprague's Pipit occasionally moved into the vicinity of the large flock of pipits, but even then did not truly associate with them, acting more as an individual apart from the flock.

The Sprague's Pipits differed slightly in behavior from the other pipits, tending to run rather than fly when approached by an observer. In addition the Sprague's Pipits were not seen to bob their tails as did both the Water and Red-throated pipits. In appearance the Sprague's Pipit more closely resembled the Red-throated than the Water Pipit, however, *spragueii* lacked the bold supercilary and heavy breast streakings of *cervinus*, and had a scaly look to the upperparts instead of the conspicuous streaking of the Red-throated Pipit.

The Sprague's Pipit nests in the prairies of the northern Great Plains, and winters primarily from Texas south to Veracruz in eastern Mexico. It is scarce along the eastern side of the Rocky Mountains, being considered an uncommon straggler to eastern Colorado by Bailey and Niedrach (1965), and reported from only three localities in extreme eastern New Mexico by Hubbard (1970).

West of the Rocky Mountains, Behle and Perry (1975) consider the Sprague's Pipit a rare winter visitant and transient in Utah, based on several sight records for the Salt Lake City and Cedar City areas; Phillips et al. (1964) treat it as rare in Arizona, on the basis of seven records; and Phillips and Amadon (1952) discovered at least four individuals near Sasabe in extreme northern Sonora, Mexico, between 19 and 22 October 1948. Two of the Arizona records are from the extreme western part of the state, with one near Topock on the Colorado River (27 September 1949) and the other on the Tule Desert west of the Sierra Pinta Mountains in extreme southern Yuma County (30 December 1958).

The Sprague's Pipit has been included among the species listed on two Christmas Bird Counts taken in California: the San Bernardino count of 30 December 1962 (Audubon Field Notes 17:284, 1973) and the Orange County (central and coastal) count of 29 December 1968 (AFN 23:417-418, 1969). Christmas Bird Counts, however, contain numerous errors as the results of misidentifications by participants, and poor screening by count compilers. Since no details accompany the reports they are best disregarded. A Sprague's Pipit reported at Lava Beds National Monument in northeastern California on 30 April 1952 (AFN 6:261, 1952) was not even treated as rare, and cannot be considered a valid record. A pipit, believed to be a Sprague's, at Goleta, Santa Barbara County, on 8 October 1964 (AFN 19:80, 1965) was clearly not a Water Pipit, but the description of the bird does not rule out the possibility of a Red-throated Pipit which now

## NOTES

appears more likely. The birds at Imperial Beach in 1974 must therefore be considered the only valid record to date for California.

Considering the bird's normal range, and its continued occurrence in Arizona (see *Am. Birds* 28:87-90, 1974 and personal observation of ca. 10 at the mouth of Gardner Canyon in Pima County 5 February 1972), we can expect additional Sprague's Pipits to appear in California. However, observers must treat all records with caution, for Red-throated Pipits do occur somewhat regularly, and the Pechora Pipit (*A. gustavi*) is a potential straggler to the state.

## LITERATURE CITED

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