

First record of Tawny Pipit *Anthus campestris* from Kerala

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Tawny Pipit *Anthus campestris* is a winter visitor to Peninsular India, but its distribution does not cover Kerala (Rasmussen & Anderton 2005; Sashikumar *et al.* 2010). This short note reports the sighting of this species from Madayippara (12°01'48"N, 75°15'36"E), Kannur district, Kerala with photographs.

Madayippara, located 22 km north of Kannur District HQ, is a large laterite hillock with sparse grass and open rocky areas. On 29 January 2011 at 1630 hrs, PCR and PBB observed a pipit (Motacillidae: *Anthus* sp.) near the south-western side of Madayippara. The bird was feeding on the ground. PBB photographed it and circulated the pictures among several bird-watchers (Fig. 1). The pipit was constantly wagging its tail, and uttered a 'plip' call when flushed. It was similar in size to a Blyth's Pipit *A. godlewskii*, which was present for ready comparison in

the same area. The photographs showed a pipit with a prominent whitish supercilium, pale mantle, streaked crown, faintly streaked breast, and reasonably well-marked median coverts with triangular or oval dark centres. The bill was broad based, straight, with a pink base. The lores appeared dark, and the bird showed a distinctly dark brown malar stripe, and an indistinct moustachial stripe. Most bird-watchers who saw the photographs concluded the bird was a Tawny Pipit.

PCR spotted another pipit belonging to the same species on the morning of 6 February 2011, c. 100 m from the first sighting. That same evening it was sighted there again, by PCR & JT, and photographed (Fig. 2). The photographs also showed a similar bird with an evenly dark loreal line extending through the eye to the rear. Upper parts were sandy brown with very few feathers with dark edges. The bird showed buff edges to flight feathers, contrasting pale buff edges to tertial feathers, and the median coverts showed differently contrasting pale edges. Rectrices were clearly buff. These photographs further confirmed the presence of this pipit at Madayippara for more than a week during this time of the year.

Compared to the Paddyfield Pipit *A. rufulus*, which we are very familiar with, this pipit had very few streaks on its breast and flanks; unlike the former, it had dark lores, sandy brown un-streaked mantle, and buff outer rectrices. Further, it had a wagtail-like jizz with a slightly longer tail, quite different from Paddyfield Pipit as well as the migrant Blyth's Pipit. Long-billed Pipit *A. similis*, which also have dark loreal line and buff rectrices, is much larger and sports a heavier bill. These field characteristics and further scrutiny of the photographs we took were enough to identify this bird as Tawny Pipit.

These sighting records though interesting, are not completely unexpected. This species is a regular, but scarce, winter migrant to the neighbouring areas in Karnataka, like Mysore, and Bangalore (Praveen J., *pers. comm.* February 2011) and similar vagrant sightings of a few species like Red-throated Pipit *A. cervinus*, Grey-necked- *E. buchanani*, Black-headed- *E. melanocephala*, and Red-headed- *E. bruniceps* Buntings have been recorded in recent years from the wetlands of northern Kerala (Sashikumar *et al.* 2011).

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Photo: P. B. Biju

Fig. 1. Tawny Pipit *Anthus campestris*.



Photo: Jayan Thomas

Fig. 2. Tawny Pipit from Madayippara.