

## Correspondence

### A Meadow Pipit *Anthus pratensis* from Leh, Ladakh: A new species for India

The Meadow Pipit *Anthus pratensis* breeds in the Western Palearctic and winters in more southerly latitudes with a range extending till south-western Asia, Iran, and Afghanistan (Tyler & Sharpe 2020). Though it has been reported from Pakistan, all prior claims of a Meadow Pipit from India were rejected by Rasmussen et al. (2017). Here, I report the presence of a Meadow Pipit from the marshes off Chuchot road (34.06°N, 77.63°E), on the southern banks of the Indus River, Leh (Ladakh).

On 04 April 2021, while I was birding with Waheed-ul-Rashid, at Chuchot, we saw a pipit that we initially thought was a Red-throated Pipit *A. cervinus*. Waheed took one photo (Rashid 2021a) of the bird and posted it, later in the day, on the *Ask Ids of Indian Birds* Facebook forum. The initial feedback on the photograph was a 'Meadow Pipit', but one photo was not enough to confirm a rare species. On 06 April 2021, we returned to the same spot and at 1200 h, we spotted the bird again. This time we got a good series of photographs from many angles (Arhaan 2021; Rashid 2021b) [159–168]. We could not record any calls. These photos were posted again on Facebook, and eBird, and there was a general concurrence identifying the bird as a Meadow Pipit. However, there were a few comments that discussed a possible first winter Red-throated Pipit. Interestingly, Padma Gyalpo also photographed a similar Meadow Pipit on 23 April 2021 from the Holy Fish Pond at Shey on the northern side of the Indus, about half a kilometer away, as the crow flies, from our spot (Gyalpo 2021). All these photos serve as evidence to the fact that at least one Meadow Pipit visited Leh during the spring of 2021, making it a new species for India. The nearest confirmed records are from Bannu, and Kohat districts in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan (Rasmussen et al. 2017), which is more than 700 km westward of Leh.



159.



160.



161.



162.

All: Mohd Tanveer

### References

- Arhaan, M., 2021. Website URL: <https://ebird.org/checklist/S84916739>. [Accessed on 28 August 2021.]
- Gyalpo, P., 2021. Website URL: <https://ebird.org/checklist/S86206478>. [Accessed on 28 August 2021.]
- Rashid, W., 2021a. Website URL: <https://ebird.org/checklist/S85209981>. [Accessed on





163.



166.



164.



167.



165.



168.

Ali: Mohd Tanveer

28 August 2021.]  
 Rashid, W., 2021b. Website URL: <https://ebird.org/checklist/S85212345>. [Accessed on 28 August 2021.]  
 Rasmussen, P. C., Prys-Jones, R. P., & Praveen J., 2017. A reassessment of Meadow Pipit *Anthus pratensis* records from India, and their rejection. *Indian BIRDS* 13 (3): 60–63.

Tyler, S., & Sharpe, C. J., 2020. Meadow Pipit (*Anthus pratensis*), version 1.0. In *Birds of the World* (J. del Hoyo, A. Elliott, J. Sargatal, D. A. Christie, and E. de Juana, Editors). Cornell Lab of Ornithology, Ithaca, NY, USA. Website URL: <https://doi.org/10.2173/bow.meapip1.01>. [Accessed on 28 August 2021.]

– Mohd Tanveer

Mohd Tanveer, Leh, Ladakh, India. E-mail: [rajiv238@gmail.com](mailto:rajiv238@gmail.com)



### Editorial comments

We circulated the available pictures to a number of experts for concurrence and this commentary is based on the responses we received. These birds were rather difficult to pin as Meadow Pipit because first winter Red-throated Pipits would look extremely similar. In fact, an adult Red-throated had occurred at the same site a few days earlier. Additionally, these birds appear to be more heavily-marked and patterned than typical Meadow Pipits, particularly in the malar and upper breast region, and had crisp wing bars. Though the head pattern looks like that of a Meadow Pipit, it is not as bright and buffy as typical birds and had uniform ear coverts with dark front/lower borders. Observers did not record the call and pictures showing rump and under-tail coverts were just average. Hence, the ID discussion centered around whether these variations are within a Meadow Pipit. However, most respondents were able to confirm these birds to be Meadow Pipit and experts, who initially favoured a Red-throated Pipit, were more confident in the second round of discussion that a Meadow Pipit was likelier. While there is still an element of uncertainty, a few confident responses (7 out of 9) enabled us to treat this as a confirmed ID.

There are multiple birds involved here – the bird from 04 April has three freshly moulted greater coverts while the bird from 06 April had only one new greater covert on one side (none on the other side). Hence, they are different birds. The photographs on the 26 April show two inner greater coverts and three tertials newly moulted tertials, but it is possible for the same bird of 06 April to have shed and replaced one greater covert in that period.

**04 April 2021:** The single photograph (Rashid 2021a) shows thin, spikey bill, flank streaking that breaks up into thin streaks on the flanks (not long, strong dark lines), bill base rather dull, apparent olive tones to parts of the plumage, all that fit a Meadow Pipit than a Red-throated Pipit.

**06 April 2021:** The bird also shows long, thin and dull bill with an olive wash on overall buff ground colour (flank ground colour almost white in Red-throated). A couple of photographs show the rump/uppertail area almost unpatterned with only the longest uppertail coverts with diffuse dark centers, though it is difficult to be absolutely sure. Moustachial stripe is broad and diffuse (vs narrow and well-defined in Red-throated Pipit), undertail coverts uniform white (with at least one broad black shaft streak in Red-throated) and the inner-edge of tertials has only short/diffuse pale fringe around tip (in Red-throated well defined along tip to inner-edge). The broad dark centers of the scapulars emphasizing the pale mantle tramline is probably fit a Red-throated Pipit more but is still within the variation of Meadow Pipit. Some photographs seem to show rather long, thick flank streaks that have coalesced into thick blackish lines like a Red-throated Pipit. However, the bird appears to be wet and the flank feathers seems to have coalesced to give an impression that they are thick and continuous; still a few Meadow Pipits do show that. There is also a very faint creamy-warm wash to the central throat but that does not necessarily point towards a Red-throated Pipit as an odd Meadow can be tinged so.

**23 April 2021:** The bird (Gyalpo 2021) is rather drab and plain olive, the bill is thin and very dull, it has none of the bold stripy effect of Red-throated Pipit, and the flanks, from what can be seen, are okay for a Meadow Pipit. Despite the late date, there is no trace of breeding plumage, which would be expected on any Red-throated Pipit by now.

Red-throated Pipits would, generally, have rather strong, heavy, rich orangey bill and rather variegated cold grey, buff, or creamy tones—and not the more subdued olive tones of all these birds. All photographs show newly moulted spring birds, and exceptionally few first summer female Red-throated Pipits lack rufous on the throat and by now most birds would start showing some trace of breeding plumage. None of these birds even show a trace of red/rufous on the throat.

Our profuse thanks to Andy Stoddart, David Cooper, John Martin, Mark Lawlor, Mike Prince, Nils van Duivendijk, Oscar Campbell, Per Alström, and Ramit Singal for the thoughts and comments that enabled us to arrive at a conclusion on the ID.

### The Common Starling *Sturnus vulgaris* in Odisha, India

The Common Starling *Sturnus vulgaris* is a winter migrant to most of the Indian Subcontinent except the extreme north-western region, where it breeds. It is a regular, widespread winter migrant to western and northern India, and mostly a straggler to the eastern and southern parts of the country (Grimmett et al. 2011; Rasmussen & Anderton 2012; eBird 2021).

On 05 December 2015, PD spotted a Common Starling in a mixed flock of Asian Pied Starling *Gracupica contra* at Alamgiri Hills (20.63°N, 86.25°E), Jajpur District, Odisha [169]. RKM & KA spotted another individual on 20 November 2019 at Ranibandh (21.93°N, 86.77°E), Baripada, Mayurbhanj District. The bird was foraging in the early hours, with seven Jungle Mynas *Acridotheres fuscus*. Various avian checklists from Odisha list the species (Inskipp 2014), and they trace back to a reference from Chilika Lake (Balachandran et al. 2009). It has been occasionally seen around Barkul boat jetty and adjoining cultivated areas around Mangalajodi along with Rosy Starlings *Pastor roseus*. No details of years or months of observation are available. Hence, the species may be a scarce winter visitor to Odisha. There are recent reports from adjacent West Bengal (eBird 2021), and hence these records are not surprising.



169. Common Starling photographed in Odisha.