

First Report of American Pipit (*Anthus rubescens*) discovered on Cuba 12/3/2014

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American Pipit (*Anthus rubescens rubescens*) in the family Motacillidae was discovered 17 Km southwest from La Bajada Ranger Station, December 3, 2014 at El Verraco (N 22.55095 W084.37462) on Cabo San Antonio, Guanahacabibes National Park during a yearly Cuban Bird Survey under the auspices of Caribbean Conservation Trust, during an U.S. Government authorized bird survey for Halifax River Audubon of Florida. Cabo San Antonio is the westernmost peninsula in Cuba known as a significant migrant trap for many fall migratory species (MJ Good 2012, Felipe Chaves-Ramirez, 2012) traveling from Florida and the East coast migratory pathway.

Cuba represents over 50 percent of the entire land mass of the West Indies and is a significant stopover and migratory route for North American breeding birds. (Craven and Hall, 2002; Craven BW) According to BirdLife International, which has designated 28 Important Bird Areas (IBAs) in Cuba, “Over 370 bird species have been recorded in Cuba, including 28 which are endemic to the island and 29 considered globally threatened”. Due to its large land area and geographical position within the Caribbean, Cuba represents one of the most important countries for Neotropical migratory birds – both birds passing through on their way south (75 species) and those spending the winter on the island (86 species). This report is the first for AMERICAN

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PIPIT (*Anthus rubescens*) verified by Orlando Garrido and Arturo Kirkconnell, (Personal Comm.) co-authors of the Birds of Cuba, as a Cuban National Record.

The American Pipit has recently been recorded from Hispaniola in 2002 (one record). Sprague's Pipit has also been recorded from Grand Bahamas, Eleuthera and Exuma. Neither species has been reported from Cuba before, although Rafaele et. al (1998 p. 385) considered that was possible in Cuba.

American Pipit is approximately six to seven inches (15-18 cm) and the size of a large sparrow. It is a slender brown bird of open country with crown and upperparts uniformly brown; underparts buff white with black streaks; outer tail feathers white; legs dark/black. American Pipit has a propensity for bobbing its tail and usually walks rather than hops. Sprague's Pipit has a streaked back and yellow legs and seldom bobs its tail.

American (Water) Pipit breeds from northern Alaska, Mackenzie, Canadian Arctic islands, and Newfoundland, south in mountains to California, New Mexico and northern New Hampshire on Mount Washington and Maine on Mount Katahdin. The New England populations represent post-glacial relic Spruce-Fir Krummholz and Subalpine Meadow (Gawler and Cutko 2010) breeding habitat. They are known to winter across the southern states and north to British Columbia and southern New England, south to Guatemala, southern Mexico including the Yucatan Peninsula, the Gulf Coast and southern Florida but rarely to the West Indies, Bahamas south to San Salvador, Jamaica and Swan, Providencia and San Andres Islands. They have not previously been reported on Cuba. This report verifies what Rafaele et. al. (1998) suggested that American Pipit utilizes Cuba, the extent of which is not known.

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During the breeding season American Pipit prefer Tundra and rocky Arctic, windswept alpine slopes and alpine meadows. As migrants they utilize sea-beaches, mudflats, wet meadows, sandy areas, pastures, and cultivated fields, agricultural land, golf courses and mountaintops during the non-breeding season.

Historic weather patterns for Cuba from November 30 to December 6 included a low pressure system with winds predominately out of the East North East, 24 to 28 km/h with dropping barometric pressure and a Waxing Gibbous to Full moon.

Weather patterns mimicked the migration timeline of detection during our survey and explain the high diversity and numbers of migratory species recorded in unexpected Cuban habitats. There is a 96 hour period of East North Easterlies from Sunday November 30 to Thursday December 4 followed by two smaller breaks in migration indicated by Southwesterly winds with velocities in the single digits. Every location we monitored produced unique assemblages of Neotropical species.

The occurrence of undetected northern migrants occurs yearly on the Guanahacabibes Peninsula, but the number of qualified ornithologists birding in this region has been extremely limited to opportunities like those offered through the Caribbean Conservation Trust and the occasional Guanahacabibes National Park surveys. Eco-tours have become an important and popular form of travel (Craven and Hall JCO 16) with many companies focused on birdwatching and clientele with strong bird identification skills allowing the documentation of rare migratory species. The conservation values of these tours are important for documenting the temporal records of birds like American Pipit. This observation represents the first report in the Pinar del Rio province located in western Cuba. (O. Garrido, pers. Comm.)

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American Pipit was formerly considered a form of Water Pipit (Bond 1960) of the Old World lineage. During the winter, large flocks gather in open fields typically rising in unison when disturbed, circle and resume their feeding. In the North, the American Pipit feeds on the countless insects at edges of tundra puddles, in alpine meadows it visits unmelted snowbanks feeding on insects transported by the winds. We observed these same behaviors at El Verraco and have photos of this bird feeding on flies and other insects.



American Pipit (*Anthus rubescens*) showing dark legs, buffy belly with streaking to the malar region. A buffy supercillium, thin black eye line with white thin eye rings. White outer tail feathers were evident in flight (photos MJGood).

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