

Sprague's Pipit
22 Feb 1998
Waterman Creek A., O'Brien Co., IA
*Lee A. Schoenewe
IBL 68:62

Record Number: 98-07
Classification: A-D

DOCUMENTATION

Lee A. Schoenewe [*6/9/98]

REFERENCES

Field Reports: IBL 68:62
Records Committee: IBL 69:90

VOTE: 4 NA, 3 A-D

A-D, The date is odd, but Kansas has a 20 Jan record. The most convincing aspect of this record is the behavior. I observed this species in N. Dakota and noted exactly the same behavior. There is virtually no description of the bird itself (except for the tail pattern which is supportive), but don't think this is surprising from an essentially nondescript bird.

A-D, The bird was not seen well, but its call and flight song as described eliminate similar species. The behavior of this bird is also characteristic of the species.

NA, This bird does migrate early and singly and display with call is typical. But I would like to see complete plumage description, leg color etc. for first state record.

NA, Light underwings with buffy body and white outer tail feathers fit either pipit, as does skylarking behavior. The song is more suggestive of American Pipit to me, still an extremely early bird in northern Iowa in February.

NA, The two things that fail this vote for me are: Date: 7 weeks before the earliest record Minn. sighting. Identification by flight song: Lee apparently has no previous experience with Sprague's Pipit. It's song has been described variously as: a "descending series of musical tzee and tzee-a notes", a sound "like tinkling sleigh bells", the sound of "links of chain being coiled", and a song "which resembles the pattern and breezy quality of the Veery's song." Quite the variety of interpretation! Also, if you accept the possibility of breeding-season displays in Feb., you open the possibility of singing Smith's Longspur or others we don't hear in Iowa.

A-D, The behavior, song, and habitat are more convincing to me than the many previous reports that were based on morphology. The white outer tail feathers are supportive. A winter record is not what I expected, but is possible, and, with the warm weather, an early migrant is not out of the range of possibility.

NA, Description of bird, including vocalizations, is convincing. Behavior also seems right for Sprague's Pipit. Problem is date of sighting, although Feb was very warm. The earliest dates for MN & SD are mid Apr, SD has a 30 Mar date. I am inclined to accept but would like to discuss.

RE-VOTE (at meeting 4/19/98): 6 A-D, 1 NA

DOCUMENTATION FORM

Species How many? SPRAGUE'S PIPIT - 1
 Location? WATERMAN CREEK AREA OSBORN CO.
 Type of habitat? OPEN, WEEDY FIELD WITH OLD CORN STUBBLE
 When? date(s): 2/22/98 Time: . 2:45 PM
 Who? your name and address LEE A. SCHOENEWE

Others with you NANCY P. SCHOENEWE

Others before and after you

Describe the bird(s) including only what you observed. Include size, shape, details of all parts (bill, head, neck, back, wing, tail, throat, breast, belly, under tail, legs, feet). Also describe voice and behavior. AFTER HIKING ALONG WATERMAN CREEK, I WAS CUTTING ACROSS AN OPEN FIELD WHEN A SPARROW-SIZED BIRD FLUSHED IN FRONT OF ME, FLEW A SHORT DISTANCE AND DROPPED BACK INTO THE WEEDS. IT MADE A SHARP, MUSICAL WHEET CALL WHEN FLUSHED. I FLUSHED THE BIRD AGAIN AND WITH THE CALL NOTE, IT ROSE HIGH IN THE AIR, GAVE A CHEE, CHEE, CHEE, CHEE, CHEEEE SONG, TRAILING OFF AT THE END AND DROPPED BACK TO THE GROUND. I NOTICED WHITE OUTER TAIL FEATHERS WHEN IT FIRST FLEW, SIMILAR TO A VESPER SPARROW. I FLUSHED THE BIRD A THIRD TIME AND IT ROSE HIGHER IN THE AIR REPEATING THE SONG SEVERAL TIMES.

Similar species and how eliminated: SMITH'S LONGSPUR - SONG IN FLIGHT VS RATTLE CALL
 WATER PIPIT AND VESPER SPARROW - CALL NOTE AND SONG IN HIGH, CIRCLING FLIGHT
 LIGHT UNDERWINGS WITH BUFFY BODY

Did any one disagree or have reservations about identification?

If yes, explain: NANCY DID NOT SEE THE BIRD BUT HEARD THE SONG FROM A DISTANCE

Viewing conditions: lighting, distance (how measured), and optical equipment: AFTERNOON SUN, APPROX. 25 YDS WHEN FLUSHED, 8X40 BINOCULARS

Previous experience with this species and similar ones:

FAMILIAR WITH WATER PIPITS

References and persons consulted before writing description:

PETERSEN FIELD GUIDE

How long before field notes made? IMMEDIATELY

this form completed? 4 HRS

Mail original form to field editor for this season.

THE FOURTH AND FINAL TIME I FLUSHED THE BIRD I WAS ABLE TO GET THE SUN BEHIND ME. IT GAVE THE CALL NOTE AGAIN WHEN FLUSHED AND CIRCLED HIGH OVERHEAD, REPEATING THE SONG OVER AND OVER. THE BIRD WAS ALL LIGHT UNDERNEATH WITH BUFFY COLORING NOTICEABLE ON THE BODY. IT CIRCLED VERY HIGH AND OFF TO THE WEST OVER THE CREEK UNTIL I LOST SIGHT OF IT.