

Sprague's Pipit  
4 May 1958  
Polk Co., IA  
W. H. Brown, A. Berkowitz  
Brown 1958

Record Number: 81-CU  
Classification: NA

REFERENCE

Brown, W.H. 1958. A sight record of Sprague's Pipit. IBL 28:41.  
Brown, W. 1962. Sprague's Pipit in Iowa. IBL 32:20  
Records Committee: IBL 64:70

REQUEST FOR RECONSIDERATION

Tom Kent to Records Committee, 13 Sep 1993

VOTE (1981): 7-III

III, good detail, competent observer.  
III, 3 seasoned observers - well documented.  
III, well described.

REVOTE (1993): 4 A-D, 3 NA

A-D, Date is good, description very detailed. Experienced observer.

A-D, Too bad there is no mention of the bill and what, to me anyway, is the initial key on a Sprague's; i.e., big-eyed look on buffy face. Woody Brown was so conservative, however, that I have trouble doubting the accuracy of this report. Not really unexpected, just tough to see and identify.

NA, There is considerable description here but the features are mixed for American and Sprague's pipits. See King, B. 1981. The field identification of North American Pipits. Am. Birds 35:778-788 and Parkes, C. C. 1982. Further comments on the field identification of North American pipits. Am. Birds 36:20-23. Here is my analysis of the field marks: overall gray color = American; streaked back = American -- Sprague's is scaly; underchin buffy -- seems to favor American; white collar extending across the throat -- seems to favor Sprague's; band of dark streaks across the breast = either; belly and flanks white unstreaked -- favors Sprague's; legs light = Sprague's (could they be dusky?). Zimmer (K. J. 1985. The Western Bird Watcher. Prentice Hall: Englewood Cliffs, NJ) says, "the leg color in Water Pipits is highly variable and can approach the light color of Sprague's (although even light-legged Water Pipits tend toward yellowish rather than pinkish legs)." No tail wagging = Sprague's (If bird froze at close range, would it wag its tail?). Were they driving across the area? Is it short grass with bare spots? Missing face pattern (buff with large dark eye), white outer tail feathers, eyeline?, wing bars?, flight pattern. Parkes warned concerning subspecies of American Pipit, "They are different enough to mislead an observer into thinking that two species of pipits were present." It is possible that Brown and Berkowitz could have driven up to a Sprague's Pipit if they were off the main road. I wish they had described the typical "Buff-breasted Sandpiper" look to the face and buffy rather than gray upperparts.

RE-VOTE (1993, 2nd round): 3 A-D, 3-NA, 1 no vote (previously NA)

A-D, I don't like revoting without the original documentation in hand. Streaks on back of American Pipit hard to see, back appears plain compared to Sprague's so description of streaked back seems to favor Spragues to me. I could vote either way on this one. Since I don't have the documentation, I'll stay with my original vote.

NA, Change of vote in light of additional material.

A-D, I think there is enough detail here to eliminate the only other expected pipit, Water Pipit. The white collar, white belly w/non-streaked flanks, and light colored legs eliminates Water Pipit. Japonicus, the light legged race of Water Pipit which breeds in Alaska would be unexpected in Iowa in May.

A-D, May be Dallas County. Although I still have some concerns about this report, I continue to feel it is an acceptable record. The date of observation would indicate a bird in alternate plumage. At this time of year I would think that a description of streaked back would more aptly be applied to Sprague's than American -- streaking on the back of American Pipit is pretty muted in spring. Zimmer, in The Western Bird Watcher, even describes the back and crown of Sprague's as "strongly

streaked". I think the buffiness of the underchin could apply to either species. Perhaps by inference we can conclude that this bird had a rather nondescript face. With the detail of the description, a supercilium, if it existed, would certainly be mentioned and it would be very noticeable on an American Pipit in May. To me the details most non-supporting of Sprague's are over-all gray color (judgment call) and the legs the "color of dead grass" (again a color judgment). If the legs were on the yellow side, I think this might be more supportive of American. The habitat of the area where the observation occurred is very reminiscent of short grass prairie and I've often thought that it was a likely area for Sprague's Pipit and Chestnut-collared Longspur to occasionally appear. It is actually better habitat for Sprague's than American, but in early May who knows. Overall the description, and lack of it, lead me to acceptance.

NA, I forgot to note that the leg color was the color of dead grass (yellow) rather than pink, which favors American Pipit.

NA, It looks as though there is enough geographic variation in American Water Pipit and one subspecies can have characteristics close to Sprague's Pipit, that the description from Brown has enough mixed information (as shown by one NA reviewer) that this could be another subspecies of Am. Water Pipit and not Sprague's Pipit.

81-CU

13 September 1993

To: IOU Records Committee  
From: Tom Kent  
Re: Request for reconsideration of record

**Record:** 81-CU Sprague's Pipit

**Reason for request:** Should this species be on the state list?

**Comment:** There is one accepted record for Sprague's Pipit, a sight record with brief description. Included here are four records that got a majority vote in 1981 and the one that was accepted. I question whether there is adequate evidence to keep this species on the state list.



**A Sight Record of Sprague's Pipit.** — On May 4, 1958 Mrs. Brown and I were with Albert Berkowitz at Brenton's Slough, northwest of Des Moines. This area is quite rolling and some of the higher parts will usually produce horned larks and, at times, pipits. We had seen several horned larks and were looking for pipits when we sighted one only a few feet from the car. The bird was not disturbed when we stopped and we had ample opportunity to observe it closely. We noted the following points: over-all color, grayish; back, streaked; under-chin area, buffy; collar extending across throat, white; band of dark streaks across upper part of breast; belly and flanks, white with no streaks; legs, light, color of dead grass. The bird stayed within very close range for what must have been several minutes and at no time did it wag its tail. From all indications this was a Sprague's Pipit which is considered an accidental or straggler in Iowa. The area where we found this bird is the one from which a Sprague's Pipit was reported at the time of the 1954 IOU field trip. — WOODWARD H. BROWN, 4815 Ingersoll Ave., Des Moines, Iowa.

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Brown, W. 1962. Sprague's Pipit in Iowa. IBL 32:20.

**Sprague's Pipit in Iowa.** Jim Keenan of Ogden raises an interesting question regarding the abundance in Iowa of the Sprague's Pipit. Jack Musgrove's check-list published in 1949 as a supplement to the Iowa Conservationist lists the species as "Rare" and the Iowa Distributional Check-list in 1954 calls it an "Accidental or Straggler." Dr. F. L. Roberts reported it from Spirit Lake in 1949, Dr. Laude has a 1950 record at Amana, it was found at Brenton's Slough near Des Moines on an I.O.U. Spring Meeting field trip in 1954, and one was seen at the same place in 1958 by Albert Berkowitz and the writer.

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The A.O.U. Check-list, 5th Ed., shows its breeding range as generally northwest of Iowa, but says it sometimes winters to the southeast so that some individuals should go through the state in migration. The four records referred to are all spring dates, but Mr. Keenan's records in 1949, 1950, 1959, and 1961 are all fall dates. He says he sees almost as many Sprague's as Water Pipits, and would like to know what other records the members of the I.O.U. may have. The species has been recorded regularly in recent winters by Richard Graber in southern Illinois. WOODWARD BROWN, 4815 Ingersoll Ave., Des Moines.

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Brown 1971  
p 538

Sprague's Pipit Anthus spragueii (Audubon)

Rare migrant

Anderson (1907) cited a 1895 record, and DuMont (1933), with no record other than Anderson's, said "The present status is undetermined."

There are these recent records: 23 April, 1949, "northwest Iowa" (Roberts, 1949); 16 April, 1950, Amana, Johnson Co. (PPL); 16 May, 1954, Polk Co. (GOH); 4 May, 1958, Polk Co. (Brown, 1958); 27 May, 1962, near LaPorte City, Black Hawk Co. (Burk, 1962); 4 April, 1968, Shenandoah, Page Co. (FMB). Fall dates are all from Ogden, Boone Co.: 11 October, 1949, 29 September, 30 October, and 1 November, 1959, 13 and 22 September, 1961 (JK). There is no Iowa specimen extant.

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