

Sprague's Pipit Record Number: 94-16
9 Apr 1994 Classification: NA
Kettleson's Hogsback, Dickinson Co., IA
*Lee Schoenewe
IBL 64:77, 82

DOCUMENTATION

Lee A. Schoenewe [8/19/94, 2/23/95]

LETTER

Lee A. Schoenewe to IOU Records Committee, 6 Oct 1994

REFERENCES

Field Reports: IBL 64:77

Records Committee: IBL 65:82

VOTE: 7 NA

NA, Without description of head, bill, and tail, several sparrows and Lapland Longspur cannot be eliminated. While these distinctions may have been obvious to the observer, they need to be included in the documentation.

NA, Unfortunately, the bill of this bird was not described -- had the thin bill been seen, I probably would have voted A-D. The absence of tail bobbing eliminates the similar American Pipit, but without bill description, it's hard to eliminate any of several streaked sparrows, or possibly molting longspurs.

NA, Sparrow sized, streaked breast, flesh colored legs, and buff breast and flanks doesn't eliminate several species of sparrows.

NA, This record is a struggle because some parts of the description fit well with Sprague's while others present problems. 1) Habitat description sounds better for American, but what do we know about migratory habits of Sprague's? 2) Light legs generally indicative of Sprague's, although American's can be tinged with pink and give a lighter look. 3) Presence of tail bobbing indicates American, but does lacking that behavior rule it out? One would certainly expect some display of this behavior in 25 minutes of observation if it was an American. 4) On the surface the description of the breast, belly, and flanks fit Sprague's well, but may also apply to a late winter-early spring American as the richer winter color fades. 5) Streaked back, which is really apparent at close range, applies to American. Sprague's has white feather edgings on the back, making it look scaly. 6) What to me is the most notable characteristic of Sprague's Pipit is missing in the document. American Pipit has an eyebrow while Sprague's has a big-eyed look with its dark eye on a buff face. My final analysis is that Sprague's is a possibility, but there are too many doubts for acceptance.

NA, Nothing in the description convinces me that this was a pipit. Sprague's Pipit has conspicuous white outer tail feathers, pale face with dark eye, scaly (rather than streaked) back, and characteristic flush and flight pattern. From the description this could have been a drab longspur (Smith's or Lapland).

NA, Face pattern with large looking black eye and buffy unmarked face not mentioned. Back should be scaly -- not streaked. American Water Pipit often have pale or light colored legs and can have less streaking on breast and flanks.

NA, Smith's Longspur was not considered; no mention of presence/absence of white in tail or prominent eye or pale face (Sprague's). Apr 9 early for Sprague's, OK for Smith's. Also, Sprague's usually solitary.

REVOTE 2 A-D, 5 NA

A-D, Additional information about bill helpful. Date and habitat are appropriate for this species.

NA, The additional comments are supportive of the documentation, but the distance of the view, the lateness of the provision of additional information, and the absence of data on this species in Iowa warrants a conservative view on this record. Mr. Schoenewe has not fared well at the hands of this committee. I am hopeful that this skilled birder will not be discouraged by our votes, but

rather will find the comments helpful and instructive, and will continue to submit records from this under-studied part of the state.

NA, The thin bill referred to in the letter eliminates most of the species that the characters in the documentation could have been confused with like Vesper and/or Savannah sparrow. The date also eliminates many species like Sedge Wren. This leaves only extremely rare birds like Skylark or other pipits which are even rarer. The streaked breast is not defined well enough to determine whether the streaks are thin and sparse or heavy and dense. The coloration of a winter longspur is also hard to interpret. The eyering and tail feathers were not mentioned. I am still not convinced that this is or isn't a Sprague's Pipit.

NA, Possibly a correct ID, but several important details are still missing to be certain.

NA, The additional description gives a better feel for the bird and the thin bill would seem to make it a pipit. However, I still have a shadow of a doubt and would like to see a very convincing description of this species in Iowa. A call to the bird line would have brought a lot of birders to try to confirm this sighting.

NA, Still not enough to make this beyond reasonable doubt for Sprague's Pipit. American Pipit does have streaks on the top of the head. Sprague's Pipit does not have streaking on back as does American (weak but noticeable) but does on back of head.

A-D, Additional notes helpful; however, I am wary of such late comments.

94-16

6 Oct 1994

To: IOU Records Committee

From: Lee A. Schoenewe

Re: Record Number 94-16
Sprague's Pipit
9 Apr 1994

After receiving your comments and reviewing my original documentation form, I realized I had not done a very good job eliminating longspurs and sparrows which a reviewer would have to consider possible.

When I first saw this bird it attracted my attention by its distinctly upright posture as I pulled to a stop on the road overlooking the area. My first reaction was "Smith's Longspur"; the date and location were right and it is a bird I am looking to add to my life list. As I got a better look, however, I saw the thin bill of a pipit and my observation then centered on how the bird was different from the American Pipit, a group of which I had seen the week prior.

The bird was by itself and worked through the matted grass along the edge of the marsh for a distance of 70 yards or so. The top of the head, nape of the neck and back were "streaked" with light and dark coloring as opposed to the overall darker mantle of the American Pipit. Otherwise, I cannot add to my comments on the original form.

The bird was parallel with my vehicle to start and worked behind and away from me until I lost my vantage point from the vehicle. I then got out of the truck and walked the hundred yards down into the grass at the northwest corner of the marsh where I last saw the bird. Four birds flushed well ahead of me as I walked on the west side of the marsh, but I could not be sure they weren't American Pipits.

DOCUMENTATION FORM

Species How many? SPRAGUE'S PIPIT - 1
 Location? KETTLEDON'S HOGSBACK WPA., DICKINSON CO.
 Type of habitat? GRASSLAND ALONG SHALLOW MARSH
 When? date(s): 4/9/94 Time: . 10:50 AM - 11:15 AM
 Who? your name and address LEE A. SCHONEWE

Others with you LAVONNE FOOTE

Others before and after you NONE

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. INITIALLY OBSERVED A SPARROW-SIZED BIRD ALONG THE WATER'S EDGE OF AN OPEN MARSH, WITH THE COLORATION OF A WINTER LONGSPUR. IT WORKED THROUGH THE SHORT GRASS AT THE EDGE OF THE MARSH FOR 50-70 YARDS. THE BIRD'S LEGS WERE FLESH COLORED AND IT DID NOT BOB ITS TAIL. THERE WERE STREAKS ACROSS THE UPPER BREAST, AND BUFF COLOR ON THE BREAST AND FLANKS. THE LOWER BELLY WAS WHITISH. THE BACK, NECK AND HEAD WERE STREAKED. IN CHASING THE BIRD IN THE GRASS A TOTAL OF FOUR BIRDS FLUSHED AND FLEW OFF BUT I COULD NOT CONFIRM MARKINGS ON THE OTHER BIRDS.

Similar species and how eliminated:

: AMERICAN PIPIT - LEG COLOR; BEHAVIOR; BREAST COLOR + STREAKING; STREAKED BACK

Did any one disagree or have reservations about identification?

If yes, explain: NO

Viewing conditions: lighting, distance (how measured), and optical equipment: DAYLIGHT, PARTLY CLOUDY; 30-100 YDS; PX40 BINOCULARS

Previous experience with this species and similar ones:

PRIOR W/ AMERICAN PIPIT ONLY; 2 SIGHTINGS OF AM PIPITS THIS SPRING

References and persons consulted before writing description:

PETERSON + NAT'L GEOGRAPHIC FIELD GUIDES; A. S. MASTER GUIDE TO BIRDING

How long before field notes made? IMMEDIATELY

this form completed? 2 days

Mail original form to field editor for this season.