

Status and Occurrence of Red-throated Pipit (*Anthus cervinus*) in British Columbia.

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Introduction and Distribution

The Red-throated Pipit (*Anthus cervinus*) is a small passerine found breeding from Scandinavia across arctic Russia to the Chukotka Peninsula in Siberia, and the Kamchatka Peninsula (Alstrom and Mild 2003). This species winters across central Africa, along the Nile River basin, in small numbers from Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia and Libya (Alstrom and Mild 2003). This species is also known to winter in small numbers from Greece, Turkey and the Middle East south down the Arabian Peninsula (Alstrom and Mild 2003). The Red-throated Pipit also winters in South East Asia from southern China, Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia, Burma, the Philippines, some areas of Indonesia, and parts of Malaysia (Alstrom and Mild 2003).

In North America, the Red-throated Pipit is a regular migrant in the Western Aleutians and a rare local breeder in the Bering Sea region from St. Lawrence Island, Nome and Wales to Cape Thompson and Cape Lisburne (West 2008). In the rest of the state it is a casual migrant (West 2008). Along the west coast of North America south of Alaska, the Red-throated Pipit is accidental to rare, but regular occurring species (Roberson 1980, Hamilton *et al.* 2007). In California, the Red-throated Pipit occurs every year, especially in the fall (Hamilton *et al.* 2007). This species has become so regular that the Red-throated Pipit was removed from the California Bird Records Committee review list in 1991 because there were over 201 accepted records (Hamilton *et al.* 2007, Tietz and McCaskie 2014). In Oregon, the Red-throated Pipit is an accidental species with only 2 accepted records by the Oregon Bird Records Committee (OFO 2012). In Washington, the Red-throated Pipit is also an accidental species with only 2 accepted state records by the Washington Bird Records Committee (Wahl *et al.* 2005, WBRC 2012). The Red-throated Pipit is a very rare to casually occurring species in British Columbia with over 40 Provincial records (Campbell *et al.* 1997, Toochin *et al.* 2014a, see Table 1). There are records of the Red-throated Pipit in the Yukon (Sinclair *et al.* 2003), Arizona and from the northern Hawaiian Islands (Hamilton *et al.* 2007). The Red-throated Pipit is a vagrant to Mexico with over 6 records (Howell and Webb 2010).

Identification and Similar Species

The identification of the Red-throated Pipit is covered in all standard North American field guides. The Red-throated Pipit in the fall is similar looking to the very rare Pechora Pipit (*Anthus gustavi*) which has been recorded in the Aleutian Islands and Bering Sea region of Alaska, but not yet in British Columbia or south of Alaska (Hamilton *et al.* 2007, West 2008, Toochin *et al.* 2014). Another Asian pipit that is somewhat similar is the Olive-backed Pipit (*Anthus hodgsoni*) that has been recorded in the Aleutian Islands and Bering Sea region of Alaska, as well as twice

in California and once in Nevada (Roberson 1980, Tietz and McCaskie 2014). The identification of these species is out of the scope of this article and further reading is recommended such as Alstrom and Mild (2003). In British Columbia, the Red-throated Pipit is often found amongst migrating flocks of American Pipits (*Anthus rubescens*) or on its own (Campbell *et al.* 1997, Toochin *et al.* 2014a, see Table 1). They will forage in open short grass fields or ploughed fields and tend to be more secretive than the American Pipit (Sibley 2000). Best way to find this species is to listen for it when pipit flocks are flushed (Alstrom and Mild 2003).

The adult male breeding plumaged Red-throated Pipit is a beautiful bird. The crown has dark streaks with a red eye stripe over the dark eye (Dunn and Alderfer 2011). The bill is pale at the base of the lower mandible with the rest black (Jonsson 1992). The auricular is darkish with a reddish tinge (Mullarney and Zetterstrom 2009). The nape has dark streaks (Alstrom and Mild 2003). The throat and upper breast is rosy red (Sibley 2000). The breast is white down to the undertail coverts with dark streaks that go down the flanks (Mullarney and Zetterstrom 2009). The legs are pink (Sibley 2000). The back is streaked with white and dark streaks (Mullarney and Zetterstrom 2009). The wing feathers have dark centered feathers with light edges and 2 faint wing bars (Sibley 2000). In flight, the wing tips are square shaped (Sibley 2000). The rump is dark (Sibley 2000). The tail is short with white outer tail feathers (Sibley 2000). The adult breeding plumaged females on average have a more restricted red throat and more streaks on the breast, but this can vary greatly amongst individuals (Alstrom and Mild 2003).

Birds in juvenile plumage are heavily streaked overall (Mullarney and Zetterstrom 2009). There are fine streaks on the crown, an interrupted supercilium from the base of the bill through and behind the eye (Mullarney and Zetterstrom 2009). The nape is pale and there is an auricular patch bordered by a bold white and then dark malar stripe (Jonsson 1992). The throat is white (Jonsson 1992). The bill is short and mostly pale, but is dark along the top ridge of the upper mandible and has a dark tip (Mullarney and Zetterstrom 2009). The breast is overall white with heavy uniformed dark streaks and spots that go across the chest and down the flanks (Sibley 2000). The undertail coverts are white (Dunn and Alderfer 2011). The back has bold white and black streaks (Alstrom and Mild 2003). The wings have 2 weak wing bars (Mullarney and Zetterstrom 2009). There is no primary extension past the tertials on the folded wing (Sibley 2000, Dunn and Alderfer 2011).

By far the best way to detect this species is by its rather loud explosive piercing call note which is “tsee” or “pssssss” that drops in pitch and is most often given in flight (Sibley 2000).

The adult nominate American Pipit found across much of North America has a buffy breast with light breast streaks that go across the upper chest (Sibley 2000). The back is gray lacking streaks

(Dunn and Alderfer 2011). The undertail coverts are buffy (Alstrom and Mild 2003). This species has a longer tail that is noticeable when directly compared to the Red-throated Pipit, especially seen on birds in flight (Sibley 2000, Alstrom and Mild 2003). The legs are pale pink (Dunn and Alderfer 2011). The Siberian subspecies of the American Pipit (*A. r. japonicus*), by some authorities thought to be its own species, is white breasted with heavy breast streaks that extend down the lower flanks and has a thick prominent malar stripe (Alstrom and Mild 2003). The wings have 2 bold wing bars and bold white edges to the tertail feathers (Alstrom and Mild 2003). It lacks mantle streaks and the legs are pink (Sibley 2000, Alstrom and Mild 2003). Like the North American subspecies, Siberian birds have a longer tail than the Red-throated Pipit (Alstrom and Mild 2003).

The flight call notes of the American Pipit are a high squeaky chirp “*slip*” or “*slip-ip*” (Sibley 2000, Dunn and Alderfer 2011).

Occurrence and Documentation

The Red-throated Pipit is a very rare to casually occurring species in British Columbia with 48 Provincial records (Toochin *et al.* 2014a, see Table 1). By far the easiest time and place to see this species in British Columbia is in early October on the Queen Charlotte Islands (Toochin *et al.* 2014a, see Table 1). There are consistently more records every year from this area than anywhere else in the Province. This is most likely due to the fact that many birds migrate straight from Alaska across the north Pacific and head to coastal California (P. Hamel Pers. Obs.). The Queen Charlotte Islands are perfectly situated on this flyway and end up getting many more birds than anywhere else in British Columbia as a result (P. Hamel Pers. Obs.). The Red-throated Pipit is found in the province mostly in the fall from September to early November with the peak of sightings in October (Toochin *et al.* 2014a, see Table 1 and Table 2). This pattern of vagrancy is mirrored by California (Hamilton *et al.* 2007). There are 19 records for the Queen Charlotte Islands, almost all from the fall migration period, but do include a couple of recent winter records (Toochin *et al.* 2014a, see Table 1). The next region that has lots of records is Vancouver Island with 19 records that almost all come from the fall migration period, but recently also have a spring record (Toochin *et al.* 2014a, see Table 1). There are also 5 records for the Vancouver area that almost all come from the fall migration period, but there is one late spring record found at Iona Island on June 12, 1997 and a winter record photographed at Boundary Bay from December 22-28, 1990 (Toochin *et al.* 2014a, see Table 1). In recent years there have been 3 records from the Fraser Valley, a couple of records come from the Sumas Prairie area, with one from nearby Matsqui Prairie, and all have been found with fall migrating flocks of American Pipits (Toochin *et al.* 2014a, see Table 1). There is 1 fall record for the interior, from the Ootsa Lake region in the fall (Toochin *et al.* 2014a, see Table 1).

There is also 1 fall record from the Sunshine Coast from the Sechelt Airport (Toochin *et al.* 2014a, see Table 1).

The Red-throated Pipit is more likely to be heard before it is actually seen (Alstrom and Mild 2003). Observers wanting to find this species should become familiar with the Red-throated Pipits' distinct call note. On the ground, the Red-throated Pipit has a preference for denser vegetation than American Pipit, but this species has been detected in open grassy areas, turf farms, beaches, and other areas where American Pipits congregate (Alstrom and Mild 2003). As with any sighting of a rare species, photographs or audio-recordings of the call notes are encouraged to properly document all provincial records.



Figure 1: Record #31: Red-throated Pipit immature at Sandspit, Queen Charlotte Islands on October 12, 2013. Photo © Andrew Keaveney.

Table 1: Records of Red-throated Pipit for British Columbia:

- 1.(1) (heard only) October 2, 1985: Keith Taylor: Swan Lake, Victoria (Toochin *et al.* 2014b)
- 2.(1) adult fall plumage October 5, 1985: Michael Force: Piper Rd., Burnaby Lake, Burnaby (Campbell 1986a, Campbell *et al.* 1997)
- 3.(1) immature October 21, 1990: Danny Tyson, Rick Tyson, mobs: Iona Sewage Ponds, Richmond (Toochin *et al.* 2014c)

- 4.(1) immature December 22-28, 1990: Bill Lamond, mobs (photo) Boundary Bay Airport, Delta (Siddle 1991b, Dorsey 1996a, Toochin *et al.* 2014c)
- 5.(1-4) adults & immatures September 4-November 21, 1991: Mike Bentley, mobs (photo) Sandspit, QCI (Siddle 1992a, Toochin *et al.* 2014a)
- 6.(1) adult September 19-21, 1992: Keith Taylor, mobs (photo) Vantreight Bulb Fields, Central Saanich (Bain and Holder 1992e, Siddle 1993a, Davidson 1993)
- 7.(1) immature November 4, 1995: Adrian Dorst (specimen) Tofino (Bowling 1996a, Toochin *et al.* 2014b)
- 8.(1) fall plumage September 20, 1996: Keith Taylor: Vantreight Bulb Fields, Central Saanich (Bain and Holder 1996e, Toochin *et al.* 2014b)
- 9.(1) adult male September 22, 1996: Keith Taylor, mobs (photo) Esquimalt Lagoon, Colwood (Pearce 1996, Bain and Holder 1996e, Bowling 1997a, Toochin *et al.* 2014b)
- 10.(1) immature November 4-5, 1996: Peter Hamel, Margo Hearne: Sandspit Airport, QCI (Bowling 1997a, Toochin *et al.* 2014a)
- 11.(1) adult breeding plumage June 12, 1997: Ken Klimko, Kris Klimko: Iona Island Sewage Ponds, Richmond (Bowling 1997c, Plath 2000, Toochin *et al.* 2014c)
- 12.(1) ad bright pl. October 11, 1997: Guy Monty and Donna McKean: on banks of the Cheslatta River, Ootsa Lake (Toochin *et al.* 2014a)
- (2) adults & immatures October 12, 1997: Guy Monty and Donna McKean: on banks of the Cheslatta River, Ootsa Lake (Toochin *et al.* 2014a)
- 13.(1) immature October 23-24, 1999: Keith Taylor, mobs: Vantreight Bulb Fields, Central Saanich (Shepard 2000, Toochin *et al.* 2014b)
- 14.(1) adult female October 31, 1999: Peter Hamel, mobs: Sandspit Airport, QCI (Shepard 2000, Toochin *et al.* 2014a)
- 15.(1) (heard only) May 17, 2000: Peter Hamel, Margo Hearne: Skonun Point (Toochin *et al.* 2014a)
- 16.(1) immature October 17-18, 2001: Keith Taylor, and other observers: Vantreight Bulb Fields, Central Saanich (Cecile 2002a, Toochin *et al.* 2014b)
- 17.(1) adult fall plumage September 13, 2003: Rick Toochin: 96th Street, Boundary Bay, Delta (Cecile 2004a, Toochin *et al.* 2014c)
- 18.(1) immature September 21, 2003: David Allinson: RPBO, Metchosin (Toochin *et al.* 2014b)
- 19.(1) fall plumage September 28, 2003: Rick Toochin, Jason Osterhold: RPBO, Metchosin (Toochin *et al.* 2014c)
- 20.(1) immature October 2, 2004: Jukka Jantunen, Jamie Fenneman: Sechelt Airport (Toochin *et al.* 2014a)
- 21.(1) immature November 6, 2007: Rick Toochin: Goodridge Peninsula, Sooke (Toochin *et al.* 2014b)
- 22.(1) adult September 1, 2008: Rick Toochin, Louis Haviland: Sooke (Toochin *et al.* 2014b)
- 23.(1) fall plumage October 21, 2008: *fide Surfbirds.com* (video) Victoria [with a japonicus pipit as well] (Toochin *et al.* 2014b)
- 24.(1) adult breeding plumage May 9-12, 2010: Mike Bentley, and other observers (photo) Martindale, Central Saanich near Victoria (Charlesworth 2010b)

- 25.(1) fall plumage September 19, 2011: Peter Hamel Margo Hearne: Sandspit Airport, QCI
(Toochin *et al.* 2014a)
- 26.(1) (heard only) September 19, 2011: Mark Wynja: Tofino Airport, PRNP
(Toochin *et al.* 2014b)
- 27.(1) immature November 2, 2011: Margo Hearne: Skonun Point (Toochin *et al.* 2014a)
- 28.(1) immature September 21, 2012: Rick Toochin: Dixon Road and No. 5 Road, East
Abbotsford [with several American Pipits](Toochin *et al.* 2014d)
- 29.(5) adults December 28, 2012: Peter Hamel, Margo Hearne: Masset Bird Sanctuary, Masset
(P. Hamel Pers. Comm.)
- 30.(1) (heard only) September 25, 2013: Ian Cruickshank: RPBO, Metchosin
(Toochin *et al.* 2014b)
- 31.(2) fall plumage September 27, 2013: Andrew Keaveney: Sandspit, QCI
(Toochin *et al.* 2014a)
- 32.(1) fall plumage October 2-12, 2013: Andrew Keaveney (photo) Sandspit, QCI
(Toochin *et al.* 2014a)
- 33.(1) fall plumage September 29, 2013: Andrew Keaveney: south beach east of Skonun Point
(Toochin *et al.* 2014a)
- 34.(1) fall plumage October 8, 2013: Ian Cruickshank: RPBO, Metchosin
(Toochin *et al.* 2014b)
- 35.(1) fall plumage September 30, 2014: James Bradley, Peter Hamel, Margo Hearne: Sandspit
Airport (P. Hamel Pers. Comm.)
- 36.(1) (heard only) October 4, 2014: Rick Toochin: Sandspit Airport (R. Toochin Pers. Comm.)
- 37.(1) immature October 5, 2014: Rick Toochin: Skonun Point, Masset (R. Toochin Pers. Comm.)
- 38.(2 immatures October 5, 2014: Peter Hamel, Martin Williams: Skonun Point, Masset
(R. Toochin Pers. Comm.)
- 39.(1) immature October 7, 2014: Rick Toochin, Mitch Meredith, Peter Hamel: Sandspit Airport
(R. Toochin Pers. Comm.)
- 40.(2) immatures October 8, 2014: Rick Toochin, Mitch Meredith, Peter Hamel: Sandspit Airport
(R. Toochin Pers. Comm.)
- 41.(1) immature October 8, 2014: Rick Toochin, Mitch Meredith, Peter Hamel: Sandspit Ferry
Terminal (R. Toochin Pers. Comm.)
- 42.(2) immatures October 12, 2014: Rick Toochin, Mitch Meredith: Skonun Point, Masset
(R. Toochin Pers. Comm.)
- 43.(1) adult October 13-14, 2014: David Fraser, mobs: Martindale Flats, Saanich
(BC Bird Alert Blog: Accessed October 14, 2014)
- 44.(1) immature October 27-November 9, 2014: Rick Toochin: Dixon Road, Abbotsford
[with several American Pipits](R. Toochin Pers. Comm.)
- 45.(1) immature September 20, 2015: Ian Cruickshank (photo) Sandspit Airport (P. Hamel Pers. Comm.)
- 46.(1) immature October 18, 2015: Neil Hughes: Martindale Flats (N. Hughes Pers. Comm.)
- 47.(1) (heard only) November 15, 2015: Jeremy Gatten: Maber Flats, near Victoria
(M. Hafting Pers. Comm.)
- 48.(1) November 16, 2015: Rick Toochin: Sim Road, Matsqui Prairie (R. Toochin Pers. Comm.)

Hypothetical Records:

- 1.(1) immature October 22, 1996: Ken Thompson: Harris Rd. dyke, Pitt Meadows [w/75 AMPI] (Toochin *et al.* 2014c)
- 2.(1) adult November 5, 2014: Raymond Ng: 33A Ave & 34 St., Delta (M. Hafting Pers. Comm.)

Table 2: Seasonal distribution of Red-throated Pipit records in British Columbia:

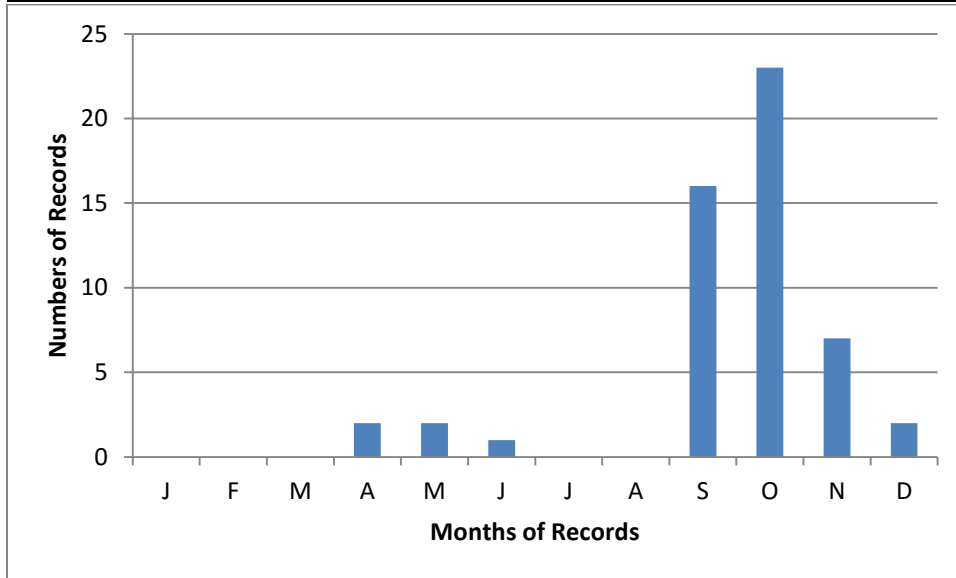


Table 2: Note the sharply defined occurrence in the fall of this species with September and October having the highest number of records.

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