

NESTING OF WATER PIPITS IN SEQUOIA AND KINGS CANYON NATIONAL PARKS

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Within recent years, several observations of the Water Pipit (*Anthus spinoletta*), adults and young, have been made in Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks; most of these observations occurred in the Upper Kern Basin. Prior to 1975, Water Pipits were not known to nest in California (Am. Birds 29:1028, 1975). On 1 August 1975, a Water Pipit nest was discovered at 3200 m in the central Sierra near Mount Conness (Gaines, Birds of the Yosemite Sierra, 1977:101). Subsequent nesting has been documented in the area.

On 25 July 1975, Morgenson, a backcountry ranger, observed an adult Water Pipit feeding two young at Lower Hitchcock Lake, 3 km southwest of Mount Whitney at an elevation of 3555 m. Morgenson stated on the field observation form that the immature pipits were "obviously born . . . in the high Sierra—evidence that these pipits nest here."

Five years later, on 8 August 1980, Morgenson observed a downy young Water Pipit near Shepherd Pass (3600 m) in the Upper Kern Basin. The immature pipit could not fly, but walked about on the ground. An adult bird stayed nearby or fluttered overhead during the observation period. Later that same summer, on 22 August 1980, Morgenson sighted another immature Water Pipit in Miter Basin, northwest of Mount Langley. The bird was "observed for several minutes at about 20 m before it flew."

At 1610 on 17 July 1981 in Center Basin (3555 m), Kings Canyon National Park, Norris observed a pair of Water Pipits foraging on the mud and pebble shore of a little snow-melt lake. One held insects in its bill. Searching for possible nests, Norris flushed one young pipit from near the shore. The young bird had a short tail, with white on the sides; its back was brown. One adult pipit (parent?) began short, sharp calls as it took wing and flew over him twice at about 3 m above the ground.

The young Water Pipit then flew in a low, direct flight across the lake inlet and into some nearby willows. The two adult pipits flew over Norris to the willows, and without landing, flew back over to their original position on the grassy hummocks near the lake shore. During this time, the two birds kept repeating the sharp "pink" note at regular intervals.

About 10 minutes later, one adult pipit took a billful of insects to the willows where the young pipit was last seen. Norris could not see the birds at this point but could hear the incessant begging call of the young pipit. The adult then flew from the willows to light upon a boulder. From his angle of view, Norris could not see if the insects were gone from the adult's bill.

Eight minutes later Norris walked over to the willows and flushed the young Water Pipit. It flew up onto the nearby talus, perched on a boulder, and bobbed its short tail up and down; the bird continuously called and kept watching him. The same adult pipit attempted to bring food to the young in the willows but could not locate it. The two birds did not meet, and the adult eventually flew back across the inlet.

While on patrol the morning of 2 July 1982, Morgenson discovered a Water Pipit nest 1.5 km west of Shepherd Pass in the Upper Kern Basin at an altitude of 3570 m. The habitat was rocky ground on a slight rise near a stream with stringer meadows. Morgenson's report describes the discovery: "Walking toward the pass, I startled an adult Water Pipit from a place between the halves of a frost-riven rock. On the ground, between the halves of rock, was a grass nest with five dark-brown eggs in it. The adult

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pipit circled overhead for a couple of minutes then began to fly away, so I left without taking time for photographs. The bird was continuously peeping the unmistakable call of a Water Pipit while flying overhead. The white outside tail feathers, the size of the bird, the shape of the bill, and the brown color assisted in identification."

As far as we can determine, this is the first nesting record of the Water Pipit for the west slope of the Sierra and the first for the parks. Water Pipits in the southern Sierra inhabit the grass hummock meadows and exposed gravel shorelines around alpine lakes near the crest of the range. This habitat is common in the high country. The Water Pipit is one of the most common passerines on the alpine fell-fields of the southern Sierra Nevada during the summer. The lack of field observations of Water Pipits in the southern Sierra in the past has had little to do with the scarcity of the bird, but is more a result of few knowledgeable birders in the high country during the pipit's nesting season.

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