FIRST RECORD OF AN OLIVE-BACKED PIPIT IN MEXICO

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On 18 October 1996, Pike and Wurster recorded Mexico's first Olive-backed Pipit (*Anthus hodgsoni*) at Cataviña, a large oasis located in the Vizcaíno Desert of central Baja California, approximately 360 km south of the international border. They found the bird as it foraged in a yard on Highway 1 approximately 1 km southeast of Hotel La Pinta, just past the crossing of La Bocana, the larger of Cataviña's two streambeds. Pike quickly identified the bird and with Wurster observed it almost continuously at close range (often 10 m or less) from approximately 1015 to 1230 and intermittently for the next hour. Wurster obtained four photographs, although the images are too small and shaded to be definitive; these have been archived at the San Diego Natural History Museum. Hamilton and Radamaker studied the bird closely for approximately 2 hours during the morning of 19 October. Peter A. Ginsburg and Ronald Saldino searched for the bird unsuccessfully on 21 October. In reporting California's first Olive-backed Pipit Capitolo et al. (2000) discuss the identification and distribution of the two subspecies, note potentially confusing species, and list previous North American and Hawaiian records. Pike's field sketch is reproduced as Figure 1, and the following description represents a synthesis of our field notes.

This was a plump pipit in fresh plumage. Bright greenish-olive tones of the upperparts and wings suggested a juvenile, as adults are typically not as brightly colored in fall; all ages fade to predominantly grayish brown by January (M. T. Heindel

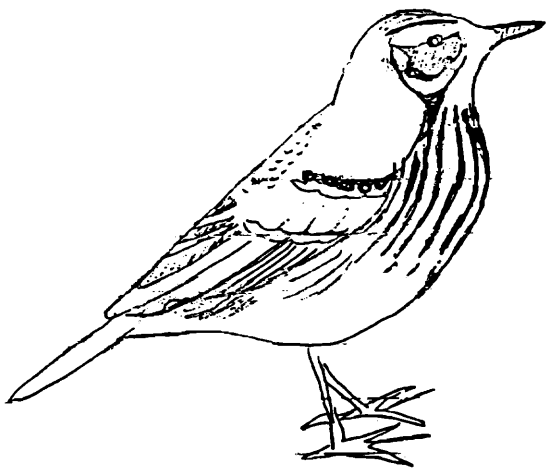

Figure 1. Olive-backed Pipit at Cataviña, Baja California, 18–19 October 1996.
Sketch by James E. Pike

in litt.). Dominance of olive tones over brownish ones across most of the upperparts suggested an individual near the bright extreme for the species (M. T. Heindel in litt.). The legs and feet were bright flesh-pink. The slender bill was perhaps slightly stouter than that of an American Pipit (*A. rubescens*), blackish with dark pink color evident at the base of the lower mandible and flesh-colored along the tomia. The eye was dark.

The prominent supercilium was rich orange-buff from bill to eye, with the posterior portion considered "whitish" by Hamilton, "buffy" by Pike, and "bright yellow-buff" by Wurster; it wrapped slightly around the ear coverts, being somewhat obscured by olive coloration at the level of the eye. This mark is generally interpreted as a light spot at the rear of the ear coverts. A narrow blackish transocular streak was bolder in front of the eye. The ear coverts were dusky to olive with a dark spot at lower rear; viewed at close range, these spots could be seen to protrude slightly from the head like small "horns." Below this was a rich buff submoustachial stripe that merged with the buffy throat across a faint malar streak; this stripe wrapped around the spot at the lower rear of the ear coverts and nearly met the whitish posterior continuation of the supercilium. The malar streak was dusky and almost nonexistent near the bill, but the lowermost portion formed a prominent dark brown triangle.

The crown was greenish olive to olive brown with fine dark streaks extending from the bill to the back of the crown; a bolder dark line formed a border with the supercilium. The nape was unstreaked olive. The mantle was warm greenish olive with dusky "hatch marks" or "scallops" forming faint streaks. Wurster described "tiny, *faint* (diffuse) streaks on lower back," and the rump and upper tail coverts as "uniform brown-olive to gray-olive."

The flight feathers were dark centered and crisply edged in green to greenish yellow—the brightest color evident on the bird. Only one or two primary tips extended past the tertials, which were large and prominent atop the folded wing, dark gray with "green-olive" or "buff" edges. The three innermost feathers of the greater secondary coverts were dark gray with buff edges. The median and outer greater secondary coverts were tipped in pale buff to form two wingbars, the upper being more pronounced. The centers of the median coverts were blackish, creating a row of dots above the upper wingbar.

The weakly notched tail was olive to gray above and white below with a very narrow pale terminal band. White showed in the outer rectrices in flight. In comparison to a typical American Pipit (not present), Hamilton felt that the tail appeared somewhat short relative to body size, while Pike considered the two species to be similar in these dimensions.

The chin, throat, and upper breast were washed with rich buff, while the sides were washed with less intense buff. The breast was heavily streaked with dark brown, somewhat concentrated on the upper breast toward the center. The sides were moderately streaked brown, while the flanks were dusky gray and possibly somewhat streaked. The belly and under tail coverts were white. Relatively long under tail coverts contributed to the large-bodied, short-tailed impression.

A flight note, often given twice during somewhat prolonged flights, was described by Hamilton as an emphatic, buzzy "spee!" that trailed off somewhat at the end. Pike described an alarm note as a drawn-out slightly wheezy "tseeip" comparable to air escaping from a tire, while Hamilton described this note as a thin "seet!" or "speet!" Pike also noted a soft "tsip" note given when the bird was relaxed and feeding.

The pipit mostly walked on open ground, picking carefully around trash and other debris; it seldom stood still while on the ground, proceeding at a steady pace with head bobbing, then running short distances to grab food items, occasionally jumping up to a foot in the air after insects. The tail was held more or less horizontally while walking and bobbed incessantly during brief pauses. The bird periodically flew into Casuarina (*Casuarina* sp.) and Peruvian Pepper (*Schinus molle*) trees, landing as high as 6 m,

and also perched on the thatched roof of a small house; we observed it feeding in these areas.

Identification of this bird to species was straightforward, the similar Tree Pipit (*A. trivialis*) being ruled out by the Cataviña bird's combination of brighter olive-green upperparts with less obvious dark streaking, more prominent bicolored supercilium, and the presence of dark and light spots on the rear ear coverts. The Cataviña bird's unstreaked rump and uppertail coverts, very fine crown streaking, and relatively faint back streaking suggest that it can be assigned to the more expected, more northern subspecies *yunnanensis* rather than the more southern *hodgsoni* (see Capitolo et al. 2000).

Other Siberian/Alaskan vagrant landbirds reported in the western U.S. (south of Alaska) and Baja California in fall 1996 included an Arctic Warbler (*Phylloscopus borealis*) in central California 28 September–1 October (McCaskie 1997, McCaskie and San Miguel 1999), a Northern Wheatear (*Oenanthe oenanthe*) in central California 22–26 September (Roberson et al. 1997, McCaskie and San Miguel 1999) and another in Arizona 29 October 1996 (Benesh and Rosenberg 1997, Rosenberg and Witzeman 1999), a Yellow Wagtail (*Motacilla flava*) in northern California 27 August (Roberson et al. 1997, McCaskie and San Miguel 1999), single Black-backed Wagtails (*M. lugens*) in southern California 27 September–7 October (returning bird, McCaskie 1997, McCaskie and San Miguel 1999), in central California 27–30 September (Roberson et al. 1997, McCaskie and San Miguel 1999), and in Oregon 13 October (Tweit and Gilligan 1997), and five Red-throated Pipits (*Anthus cervinus*) in central California 2–30 October (Roberson et al. 1997) and four more in southern California 18–20 October (McCaskie 1997). The two fall 1996 records of the Olive-backed Pipit in this region, between 26 September (Capitolo et al. 2000) and 19 October, fall within the typical seasonal window of occurrence for most vagrant landbirds that nest in Siberia or Alaska.

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