

ON SOME NEW BRITISH BIRDS.

BY

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THE PETCHORA PIPIT.—*Anthus gustavi* Swinhoe.

ANTHUS GUSTAVI Swinhoe, Proc. Zool. Soc. London, p. 90 (1883—Amoy).

IN the *Scottish Naturalist*, 1925, pp. 141-2, Surgeon Rear-Admiral J. H. Stenhouse announces that on September 24th, 1925, at Fair Isle (Shetland), he obtained a Pipit, which proved to be a male example of the Petchora Pipit.

The Petchora Pipit, whose winter and summer plumages are alike, at first glance closely resembles the Red-throated Pipit (*Anthus cervinus*) in winter plumage. The rump is spotted as in that species and the rest of the upper-parts are similar though usually rather browner, especially on the crown and rump, and usually the feathers on the sides of the mantle have distinct pale buff or whitish edges, and these when present are distinctive. The under-parts are also similar, but the chin and throat are of a purer whitish-buff and the sides of the chin are not streaked or only very lightly. The dark streaks on the breast and flanks are prominent but, it may be remarked, not always so distinctly so as in the drawing in Dresser's *Birds of Europe* (Vol. III., plate 134).

The outer pair of tail-feathers are largely buffish-white, and the penultimate pair of tail-feathers have larger wedges of buffish-white on their inner webs than *A. cervinus*, but neither this character nor the others mentioned above are invariable.

The bill is larger than in the Red-throated Pipit; the tail is shorter; the fifth primary is shorter and often not emarginated at all, though sometimes very slightly; the long inner secondaries are usually shorter; on the other hand, the hind claw, like that of the Red-throated Pipit, is longer than the hind toe and slightly curved.

The Petchora Pipit is easily distinguished from the Tree-Pipit by its spotted rump, long hind claw and not clearly emarginated fifth primary, and from the Meadow-Pipit by its spotted rump and shorter fifth primary.

The measurements of twelve males of the Petchora Pipit, taken in the same way as those given for other Pipits in the *Practical Handbook*, are as follow:—♂ wing 78-86 mm., tail 50-56, tarsus 20.5-24.5, bill from skull 14-16, hind claw 9-12.5, slightly curved and longer than hind toe. ♀ wing 74-85. Primaries: first minute, less than half primary-

coverts, second to fourth longest and equal or one or other 1 mm. shorter, fifth 4-6 shorter, sixth 10-17 shorter; third and fourth emarginated outer webs and fifth sometimes very slightly so. Tip of long inner secondary usually reaching to tip of sixth or seventh primary but sometimes between fifth and sixth.

The Petchora Pipit was found breeding on the Petchora by Harvie-Brown and Seebohm during their well-known expedition in 1875. Dresser named the bird *Anthus seebohmi* (*Birds of Europe*, Vol. III., p. 295), not realizing that it had been described twelve years before by Swinhoe from specimens obtained in Amoy.

The bird's range extends in summer from the Petchora eastwards to Kamschatka and the Bering Straits and southwards to the Altai, and we have definite records of nesting in the Petchora, Yenesei and Kolyma valleys. In winter it migrates to China, the Philippine Islands, Borneo, Celebes and Molucca. It is stated, on quite unreliable evidence, to have once occurred in Galizia, but the Scottish specimen is the first authentic record of the bird's appearance west of the Petchora.

As the Red-throated and Petchora Pipits are sometimes so much alike it would be worth while re-examining specimens of the former.

THE PADDY-FIELD WARBLER.—*Acrocephalus agricola agricola* (Jerdon).

SYLVIA (ACROCEPHALUS) AGRICOLA Jerdon, Madras Journ. Lit. & Sc. XIII., No. 31, p. 131 (1845—Nellore, Madras).

Surgeon Rear-Admiral Stenhouse is also the discoverer of this second addition to the British List. He states (*Scot. Nat.*, 1925, p. 173) that a male example of this species was shot by Mr. George Stout in a field of turnips at Fair Isle on October 1st, 1925. Admiral Stenhouse had seen a bird, which he considers was the same, on September 26th, and thinks that it probably arrived that day. There was a little east wind during the previous night.

This species, well known to Indian ornithologists as the Paddy-field Warbler, is a winter visitor to India. It breeds in Tsaidam, the Altai, East and West Turkestan, Transcaspia, Astrakhan and the Kirghiz Steppes and the south and middle Urals. A specimen obtained in the middle of April at the mouth of the Danube points to a possible more western extension of its breeding range. It was once obtained on Heligo-

land on June 12th, 1864. This specimen, the sex of which is not stated, was described by Gätke (*Birds of Heligoland*, p. 308) as being much worn, and this may account for the very small wing, the measurement of which is given as only 52 mm.

The typical form is replaced in north-west India by *A. a. haringtoni*, a darker bird with a shorter second primary; in Assam and Lower Burma by *A. a. stevensi*, a similar but still darker race, and in China and the eastern Himalayas by *A. a. concinens*, much like the typical form in colour but with a shorter second primary as in *A. a. haringtoni* and *A. a. stevensi*.

Those birds which I have seen from Kashmir appear to me to be *A. a. concinens* and I have not been able to see a breeding specimen of *A. a. agricola* from Kashmir where it has been stated to breed.

The reported occurrence of *A. a. agricola* in Africa (*Ibis*, 1918, p. 644) has already been shown to have been due to an error in identification (*Bull. B.O.C.*, XLIII., p. 97).

The Paddy-field Warbler is in general appearance much like a common Reed-Warbler but is considerably smaller, has a comparatively shorter second primary, and the third, fourth and fifth primaries are emarginated on the outer webs and not the third only. As compared with the Marsh-Warbler (*A. palustris*), in addition to the differences above noted in size and wing-formula, the upper-parts (especially the rump) are considerably more rufous or rusty-brown and not so olivaceous. The same differences in colour are noticeable in Blyth's Reed-Warbler (*A. dumetorum*), but in this case the wing-formula of the two birds is very similar and there is not so much difference in size though *A. agricola* is smaller.

Acrocephalus agricola was originally described by Jerdon, and a specimen from Jellore, Madras, without date or sex, in the British Museum is marked as the type and apparently rightly so, as by the register it was the only specimen of the species sent by Jerdon. This specimen, which appears to be in fresh winter plumage, is rather unusually dark rufous-brown above, buff below with brown-buff flanks, while the eye-stripe is greyish-white. Other Indian specimens are usually not quite so dark above, while the under-parts are whiter with a buff tinge, the flanks orange-buff and the eye-stripe clearer white.

There is a complete moult in August-September and a moult of the body-plumage in February-March.

Breeding birds (April to June) from south-east Russia and Turkestan are paler on the upper-parts than Indian specimens,

the throat and centre of the under-parts are whiter, the flanks paler and only tinged with buff and the eye-stripe white. As there are these differences, which do not seem altogether accountable by a difference in winter and summer plumage, it may be as well to give measurements of a series from each region separately, though there is very little difference.

India (October to March) ♂ wing 57-60 mm., tail 50-55, tarsus 20-22, bill from skull 12.5-14. ♀ wing 55-59, tail 49-52, bill 13-15. First primary 1-4 mm. longer than primary-coverts, third and fourth longest, fifth equal or .5-1 mm. shorter, sixth 2-3 shorter, seventh 4-5 shorter, second equals seventh or between sixth and seventh. Third to fifth emarginated on outer webs.

S.E. Russia and Turkestan (April-August) ♂ wing 57-60 mm., tail 48-57, tarsus 19-22, bill 13.5-15. ♀ wing 55-58, tail 47-52, bill 14-15. Wing-formula as in Indian birds, but second primary in a few cases equal to the sixth and in one case equal to the eighth.

Mr. Jourdain gives me the following information: "Eggs from Altai and Kirghiz Steppes are of a very different type to all that I have seen from Kashmir. The latter have pale bluish-white ground-colour with rather bold markings (something like Marsh-Warblers' eggs), whereas all the Kirghiz and Altai eggs are more like diminutive Reed-Warblers'. All these Kirghiz and Altai eggs come through dealers so one has to take them on trust, but it is remarkable that quite a number of eggs have been taken in Kashmir and yet not one of them resembles the type of the south Russian eggs."

Admiral Stenhouse describes his specimen as having the legs and feet very pale brown, bill dark horn above, pale below, iris grey-brown, and inside of mouth pale flesh.

THE ICELAND REDWING.—*Turdus musicus coburni* Sharpe.

TURDUS COBURNI Sharpe, Bull. B.O.C. XII., p. 28 (1901—Iceland).

In 1901, Dr. Bowdler Sharpe described the Iceland Redwing as being paler above and on the flanks than typical examples. His description was taken from worn June specimens and these characters not being found to hold good the Iceland race was not accepted by most ornithologists.

In 1905, in his *Beitrag zur Kenntnis der Vogelwelt Islands*, p. 232, Bernhard Hantzsch upheld the distinction of the Iceland Redwing and gave various colour differences, which on examination did not seem to hold good, and stated that the bird was larger, but as the wing-measurements he gave

were 117-122.5 mm. this was not a convincing difference, as birds of the typical race reach this size.

In 1916, Herr von Lucanus gave certain colour differences as distinguishing the race (*J.f.O.*, 1917, pp. 228-9), but he had examined only two specimens.

Recently, Dr. C. B. Ticehurst has stated (*Bull. B.O.C.*, XLV., p. 90) that the examination and comparison of a considerable series of Iceland birds show that instead of being paler they are slightly darker olive on the upper-parts and decidedly more washed with olive on the flanks than Swedish birds, while the wing of the Iceland bird is usually longer, and gives the measurements of the wings of sixteen Iceland males as 121-128 (one 120.5) mm., 75 per cent. being 122 or over, while the typical form is very rarely as long as 122 in the wing. Similarly, fifteen Iceland females measured 120 to 130 mm.

Four males from Iceland which I have examined measure : wing 119-128, tail 79-85, tarsus 27-31, bill from skull 19-21 mm., and four females have wings 120-122 mm. Continental males are usually not more than 120 mm. in the wing but very occasionally as much as 122. There is thus some overlapping, but the majority of Iceland birds are larger. The colour differences pointed out by Dr. Ticehurst are certainly present, but, as in most subspecies, there is some variation, and colour and size should be taken together.

Dr. Ticehurst had not found any British specimens of the Iceland Redwing in the collections he examined, but subsequently Mrs. Meinertzhagen discovered that a male shot by her husband in east Ross-shire on October 25th, 1924, matched birds of this form in colour and had a wing measurement of 125 mm. (*Bull. B.O.C.*, XLV., pp. 98-9). Furthermore, Surgeon Rear-Admiral J. H. Stenhouse states (*Scot. Nat.*, 1926, p. 8) that two Redwings obtained from a small party at Fair Isle on October 3rd, 1925, proved to be of this race. They were males and measured 124 and 128 in the wing. He also gives wing-measurements of nine males from Iceland, in the Royal Scottish Museum, as 119-125 mm. and ten females 118-125.

The Rev. F. C. R. Jourdain tells me that : " In habits the Iceland Redwing does not greatly differ from the Continental representative, but is naturally not a forest haunter there, as woodlands are almost absent from Iceland. It is, however, to be met with most commonly where birch scrub exists, but not invariably, and I have seen it in districts where trees were entirely absent.

“ The nest is generally on the ground or very close to it among the roots and stumps of birch, but also at times among heather and rough stones (like a Ring-Ouzel's). Exceptionally it will make use of a niche or hollow among huge boulders.

“ The number of eggs in the clutch varies from four to six and is rather lower on the average than in Continental birds. Breeding begins rather early and full clutches may be found from mid-May onward. Probably a second brood is sometimes reared, as young have been seen in the nest and fresh eggs found in July and young in August.”

Hantzsch states (*t.c.*) that the Redwing arrives in Iceland at the end of March and beginning of April and leaves about the middle of October, but some individuals appear occasionally to winter there, probably in the neighbourhood of warm springs, as Hantzsch quotes records of specimens on November 9th, December 7th and 12th, and Dr. C. B. Ticehurst (*loc. cit.*) one on November 27th, but the occurrence of the bird in winter in Iceland is evidently quite exceptional.