

MOULTING SPRING WATER PIPITS

By Ian McKerchar

All these images of Water Pipits (*Anthus spinoletta*) were taken in Hampshire, UK during late March 2008



Above: Just sometimes, this often elusive species poses well and affords good views, somewhat like this Water Pipit is here! This particular individual was undergoing its pre-breeding moult and displayed a mixture of non-breeding and breeding plumage and often appeared quite scruffy; note that the inner tertial has been dropped already and the facial pattern is in a state of disarray somewhat. Still, this bird generally appeared rather distinctly brown in the field and this appearance is still visible here even though the greyer breeding plumaged upperpart feathers are already appearing on the mantle and nape but note that the rump is rather strikingly bright warm brown, something that no Rock Pipit of any sub-species would display.



Above: On this side of the face the supercilium is still visible behind the eye (compare it to the photo above that) and is large, quite 'flared' and still distinct and whitish, including in front of the eye. The breast streaking here is particularly sharp (and almost triangular) and rather 'milk chocolate' brown (think a bar of Galaxy) against a clean and whitish base colour that continued across the entire underparts and we can already see the emergence of patches of the peachy-buff/pink on the breast that will cover much of the underparts in a few more weeks.



Above: The underparts around the rear flanks from this angle actually look quite sullied but this is more an effect of feather displacement, angle and shadow as in the field they were still very white looking and the streaking, still visible here, is sharply edged and 'pencil' thin. Again we can see that the inner tertials on both wings have been dropped and that the innermost greater covert has also been replaced (compare the feather wear and internal shape/colour); the new greyer mantle feathers are obvious and perhaps intensify the contrast with the bright brown rump.



Above: Despite having almost 'lost' the supercilium behind the eye that above and importantly, in front of, the eye remains relatively strong and pale. Note the shape of the bill in this fully 'side on' profile it is actually quite small and delicate looking, to my eyes unlike that of the stronger, longer and thicker bill of Rock Pipit. The rump is particularly bright here, and appeared so in the field being very eye-catching, especially as they had a habit of prominently showing it off!



Above: This individual is still 'fluffed up' from preening but face-on the supercilium remains distinct, especially in front of the eye and the breast streaking (still appearing quite triangular) is sharply edged and mid-brownish against a pale, whitish base colour.



Above: This bird appeared particularly 'scruffy' but was appreciated never the less! The nape and mantle have the greyish cast from the new breeding plumage feathers whilst the scapulars and wing are still fairly bright brown; two white wingbars are evident; and the underpart streaking is much reduced but still remains sharply edged and distinct.

For further reading on this subject, see the 'Logicity of *Littoralis*' article which covers the identification of Water and Rock Pipits (including *littoralis*) [here](#).

Ian McKerchar, April 2008

manchesterbirding.com