

Sighting of Rosy Pipit *Anthus roseatus* in Kachchh: a second record for Gujarat

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In this plumage, the Rosy Pipit can be confused with the Red-throated Pipit (*Anthus cervinus*) or even the Olive-backed Pipit or Buff-bellied Pipit (*Anthus rubescens*). Here, the Olive-backed Pipit could be eliminated by the overall plumage, head pattern and the densely streaked underparts. The olive-green in wings, the much thicker bill and the overall plumage helped separate this individual from similar plumaged Buff-bellied Pipit. However, separation from first-winter/non-breeding Red-throated Pipit is more complicated; here, the plain and unstreaked rump, more prominent malar patch, more densely streaked underparts, pinkish base to bill (bill base is yellowish in Red-throated Pipit) and the head pattern was different (from what is seen in Red-throated Pipit) and thus, I could identify this as a Rosy Pipit.

On 20 October 2019, while doing bird photography on the outskirts of Bhuj, Kachchh, with my son Nirav and my friend Dr. Hemen Shah, we were looking for autumn passage migrants which are seen in our region. Due to very heavy rain this year (more than 140 percent rain of average rainfall was recorded in Kachchh), most of the areas were covered with a green carpet of grass, ranging from about six inches to two feet in height. This had attracted a lot of insects and the habitat created was ideal for pipits (*Anthus* sp.).

When we were passing on the road, flocks of pipits were flying suddenly from the grass and landing about 20-30 meters away, with their typical flight. The pipits were feeding in the grass on the ground as well as from the base of small plants, where caterpillars and small insects were easily available. We noted the commonly seen pipits like Paddyfield Pipit (*Anthus rufulus*), Tawny Pipit (*Anthus campestris*), Long-billed Pipit (*Anthus similis*), Tree Pipit (*Anthus trivialis*) and an Olive-backed Pipit (*Anthus hodgsoni*) was also seen. There, I saw a pipit which was walking very fast, continuously, and feeding in the grass. We stopped and I took many photographs, from of all angles, for identification as this bird was looking little different at first sight. I even took a short video of the bird feeding and walking. A brief description is given as follows: It had a broken white eye-ring, broad supercilium with a small whitish patch behind the ear coverts, bold and densely streaked underparts, prominent black malar patch, streaked upperparts, olive-tinged wings, unstreaked rump, and the overall plumage was drab olive. The bill was blackish with the lower mandible pinkish on the basal half. I tentatively identified it as a Rosy Pipit in non-breeding or first-winter plumage.

To further confirm the identification, I posted the photos on the 'Oriental Birding Pix' group, where the photos were uploaded on the 'Oriental Bird Images' website as a first-winter Rosy Pipit. I circulated the photos to other birders here and it was identified as a Rosy Pipit by Prasad Ganpule, who stated that the unstreaked rump, overall plumage with olive-green wings and other features matched a Rosy Pipit.

For Gujarat, the Rosy Pipit is a winter vagrant. Dharmkumarsinhji (1951) saw and collected a few individual from Gaurishanker Lake, Bhavnagar, in the first week of April 1951; some individuals were in breeding or beginning to acquire breeding plumage while others were in non-breeding. These specimens are also referred to by Ali (1955) as the only record for Gujarat. There have been no records after the specimens were collected from Bhavnagar and thus, this is the second record and a first photographic record of Rosy Pipit for Gujarat. It is possible that in non-breeding / first-winter plumage, it is overlooked amongst the more common pipits seen here. I have noted that this year, due to the heavy rainfall and growth of grass and overall vegetation, pipits are seen in good numbers. More intensive bird watching may result in more sightings of vagrant pipits in Kachchh or in Gujarat this year.

References

- Ali, S., 1955. The birds of Gujarat. Part II. *J. Bombay Natural History Society*. 52 (4): 735–802
- Dharmakumarsinhji, K. S. 1951. Occurrence of Hodgson's Pipit (*Anthus roseatus*) in Saurashtra. *J. Bombay Natural History Society*. 50 (1): 175