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# First record of Red-throated Pipit *Anthus cervinus* in Central America

by Esteban Matías & Knut Eisermann

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More than 40 species of *Anthus* pipits are currently recognised worldwide (Tyler 2004). Many are long-distance migrants and most are difficult to identify in the field (Hall 1961, King 1981, Alström *et al.* 2003). Fourteen species occur in the New World, of which eight breed in South America, two regularly nest in North America, and four are vagrants (AOU 1998, Tyler 2004, Rensen *et al.* 2018). Just two species have been recorded in Central America. American Pipit *A. rubescens*, which breeds in northern North America and northern Asia (AOU 1998, Tyler 2004), is a rare winter visitor to southern Mexico, Guatemala, Belize, El Salvador, Honduras and Costa Rica (Marshall 1943, Howell & Webb 1995, Jones 2003, Eisermann & Avendaño 2007, Jones & Komar 2012; K. Murphy eBird S40583526, Macaulay Library photo 75509601) and Yellowish Pipit *A. lutescens*, a mainly South American species, is resident in Panama (Ridgely & Gwynne 1989). Here we report a record of Red-throated Pipit *A. cervinus* in the Guatemalan highlands.

On 15 April 2018, EM photographed a pipit in rocky grassland at Sierra Los Cuchumatanes, 2 km east of La Capellanía (15°24'38.7"N, 91°25'55.3"W), dpto. Huehuetenango, at 3,100 m (Fig. 1). The rufous face, supercilium, throat and upper breast are unique in the genus *Anthus* to adult Red-throated Pipit *A. cervinus* (Alström *et al.* 2003, Tyler 2004). Although the sexes cannot be distinguished with certainty, those with extensive rufous and only weak streaking on the upper breast are probably males (Alström *et al.* 2003).

The observation is notable because it is the first record of Red-throated Pipit in Central America. In the Neotropics, the species was previously reported only in central and southern Mexico and Ecuador. Mexican records away from the Baja Peninsula include singles in the Pacific slope lowlands of Michoacán in April 1988 (Howell & Webb 1989), Colima in March 1992 (Howell & Webb 1995) and Oaxaca in November 2008 (Gómez de Silva 2009). In coastal Ecuador, a first-winter was documented in March 2008 (Brinkhuizen *et al.* 2010).

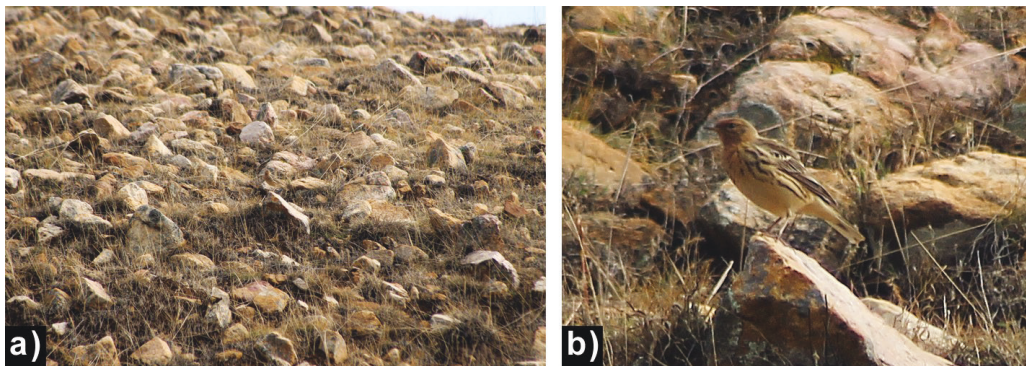


Figure 1. Adult Red-throated Pipit *Anthus cervinus*, Sierra Los Cuchumatanes, dpto. Huehuetenango, Guatemala, 15 April 2018: (a) rocky grassland habitat with the bird in the centre of the image, (b) close-up view of the bird (Esteban Matías)

Red-throated Pipit breeds mainly in Arctic tundra from northern Europe (in Scandinavia) to northern Asia (Dementiev & Gladkov 1954, Glutz von Blotzheim & Bauer 1985), but also in Alaska (Kessel & Gibson 1978). Wintering areas are mainly in the Old World tropics. Western populations (breeding from Scandinavia to the Taimyr Peninsula) are thought to winter in Africa, and eastern populations (east of the Taimyr to Alaska) mainly in South-East Asia (Glutz von Blotzheim & Bauer 1985). Some individuals of the latter population migrate instead south along the eastern Pacific seaboard, indicated by records in the western USA (Roberson 1980, King 1981, Hamilton *et al.* 2007), Mexico (Howell & Webb 1989, 1995, Erickson *et al.* 2013), Ecuador (Brinkhuizen *et al.* 2010) and now Guatemala. The species is now observed almost annually, sometimes in autumn flocks of up to 15 birds, on the Baja California Peninsula, where small numbers winter in the south in some years (Erickson *et al.* 2012; S. N. G. Howell *in litt.* 2018). Bird migration routes can be altered by unusual weather conditions (e.g. strong winds), but also by evolutionary processes, e.g. access to more favourable wintering grounds (Berthold *et al.* 1992, Berthold 2001). Causes of the apparent recent increase in numbers of Red-throated Pipit wintering in the Americas are unknown. It is possible that the species is more frequent in Middle America than the few records suggest. All pipits in the region should be well documented, because especially first-winter birds represent identification challenges (see Brinkhuizen *et al.* 2010). Other long-distance migrant *Anthus* could exceptionally occur in Central America, namely Sprague's Pipit *A. spragueii* which winters in Mexico (Howell & Webb 1995), and three Old World species reported as vagrants in North America (AOU 1998): Tree Pipit *A. trivialis*, Olive-backed Pipit *A. hodgsoni* and Pechora Pipit *A. gustavi*.

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