

Group 3. Small pipits

(Plate 2, p. 101. Text p. 132)

This group is comprised of nine species, two of which are represented in southern Africa. Firstly, the Tree Pipit is an uncommon, localized summer visitor to our subregion. It is most common in northern localities, and can be locally abundant in areas of eastern Zimbabwe, but does occur annually in northern South Africa in smaller numbers. Secondly, the Red-throated Pipit, is a rare vagrant to southern Africa (see species account for details). In addition, the predominantly Palearctic Meadow Pipit *A. pratensis*, penetrates northern Africa during its non-breeding season (austral summer).

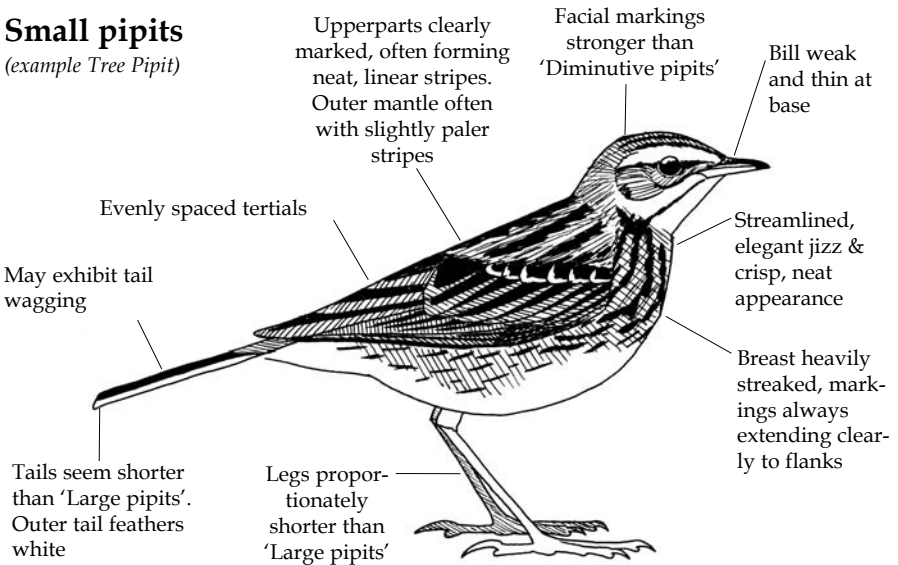
Two other species, Water Pipit *A. spinoletta* and Rock Pipit *A. petrosus*, are rare visitors to extreme North Africa. The latter two species, together with the Buff-bellied Pipit *A. rubescens*, have been the cause of some confusion for many decades in Europe and were until fairly recently considered to be the same species. Marked ecological, vocal and plumage differences have led to the three taxa now being considered as distinct species by most authorities. In addition the three subspecies of Buff-bellied Pipit (also called American Pipit) possibly also represent unique species. These races are *japonicus* (which breeds in eastern Asia), *rubescens* (North America) and *alticola* (southern Rocky Mountains).

Interestingly, the Water, Rock, Buff-bellied and Rosy (*A. roseatus*) Pipits show marked seasonal plumage variation – an unusual feature amongst pipits. These species are generally a dull pinkish or rufous colour on the breast and belly in summer, showing very few or no significant breast markings, but all are heavily streaked below in the non-breeding season.

9 Species, all breed in the Holarctic, 5 non-breeding migrants to Africa, 2 in southern Africa.

Small pipits

(example Tree Pipit)



Melodious songs, but normally silent in Africa
 Non-br Palearctic migrants, present in summer only

Fig. 20.
Small pipit