



Above: Scandinavian Rock Pipit (*Anthus petrosus littoralis*), Lynemouth, Northumberland, 6th March 2005 (Alan Gilbertson). The relatively distinctive breeding plumage of a *littoralis* Rock Pipit is obvious here and little more than a cursory glance should be enough to separate this particular individual from both British Rock Pipit (*Anthus petrosus petrosus*) and Water Pipit (*Anthus spinoletta*), but it is far from always that easy!

Scandinavian Rock Pipit (*Anthus petrosus littoralis* hereafter referred to as just *littoralis*) breeds in Denmark, Sweden, Finland and Norway; wintering from south-western Sweden to Portugal, although the main wintering areas appear to be in Britain and the Netherlands to Northern France. In the UK, many regions usually devoid of or with small numbers of Rock Pipit (*petrosus*) encounter an often large swelling of numbers during the winter months and many/most of these birds are undoubtedly *littoralis*, which has been backed up by ringing recoveries. **British Rock Pipit** (*Anthus petrosus petrosus* hereafter referred to as just *petrosus*) is a resident and short distance migrant around the coast of the UK, Ireland and North-West France.

It would appear on the surface that the identification of *littoralis* has been well covered in various literature but confusion still often reigns as misconceptions, especially with the subtle variability of *petrosus* (how often do we *really* look at those Rock Pipits during visits to the coast?) and the often similar spring plumage of *littoralis* to Water Pipit (*Anthus spinoletta spinoletta*) which readily lends itself to recent identification problems. I hope in this article to attempt to clarify the occasionally 'muddy waters' and also to utilise my personal experience of large numbers of Rock Pipit (both *petrosus* and *littoralis*) and Water Pipit (both *spinoletta* and *coutelli*) whilst collating much of what information is already 'out there'. It is not the intention of this article to cover the separation of Rock and Water Pipits from other *Anthus* species such as Meadow Pipit as this is well covered in most modern field guides, nor do I intend to cover 'Eastern' Water Pipit (*Anthus spinoletta coutelli*) or Siberian/American Buff-bellied Pipit (*Anthus rubescens rubescens/japonicus*).

When considering the identification of Rock Pipit and Water Pipit, it is important to recognise and consider the following factors:

1/. The vast majority of birds (at least) are not safely assignable to either sub-species in non-breeding plumage.

2/. Rock Pipits (of both races) can be very variable in their plumage features with a good degree of overlap; only extreme examples of *littoralis* should be identified with any degree of confidence.

3/. Viewing factors such as lighting conditions and the background (colouration) you are viewing the bird against can often have a potentially misleading impact on your judgement and it is important to ensure a relatively prolonged observation in making your assessment.

4/. Concerning colouration, especially of the outer-tail feathers, in the field it is very difficult to differentiate between various hues of white (especially between white and greyish/white), making any critical assessment a potentially torrid affair.

5/. When assessing photographic images on a computer monitor (or the back of a camera!) be careful to bear in mind the potentially misleading nature of camera angle, lighting, computer editing effects and the variability of colour representation on individual computer monitors.

IDENTIFICATION

Rock Pipit (*littoralis* and *petrosus*) in NON-BREEDING plumage

The following table only outlines the potential features useful in the separation of *littoralis* and *petrosus* in **non-breeding** plumage.

	<i>PETROSUS</i>	<i>LITTORALIS</i>
HEAD	Usually displays little, if any, obvious pale supercilium although some birds show a weak, pale (dirty-buffish) supercilium it rarely approaches that of the most extreme <i>littoralis</i> .	Although typically variable, birds displaying a strong and very pale supercilium appear indicative of this race and this seems to remain one of the more reliable features when present and can often appear more apparent when the head is viewed 'front-on'.
UPPERPARTS	Characteristically olive-grey, most pronounced on the lower back and rump.	Can sometimes tend to be slightly more brownish and less olive in tone.
UNDERPARTS	Yellowish/buff or yellowish/olive ground colour; extensive, very diffuse streaking often appearing very 'messy'.	Ground colour perhaps paler, more whitish particularly on throat which can often show a distinct contrast; breast streaking perhaps paler and clearer in at least some individuals.
TAIL	Outer-tail feathers (t6) typically light-grey or greyish/buff on outer web, very rarely appearing paler.	Outer-tail feathers (t6) appear consistently paler than <i>petrosus</i> , more light grey but often appearing whitish particularly towards the tip; this feature appears to be reasonably reliable in the potential separation of the two races.

Rock Pipit (*littoralis* and *petrosus*) in NON-BREEDING plumage



Above: Scandinavian Rock Pipit (*littoralis*), West Looe, Cornwall, 17.12.06 (Mike Buckland). This bird was ringed as a first-year bird on Oland, Sweden in September 2003, so at least we can be sure the bird is a true *littoralis* but without the 'leg-iron' could we be sure of its identification in this non-breeding plumage? Whilst a pale supercilium is present, the underparts appear quite pale and the outer-tail feather also appears quite pale. Categorising lone birds to either race without comparison is subjective at best and often impossible.



Above: Rock Pipit (*littoralis/petrosus*), Hayle, Cornwall, 18.10.04 (Ian McKerchar). So which one then; *littoralis* or *petrosus*? For me this bird could be in the 'either/or' bracket, although it appears quite brownish on the upperparts and has a reasonable supercilium.

Rock Pipit (*littoralis* and *petrosus*) in NON-BREEDING plumage



Above: Scandinavian Rock Pipit (*littoralis*), Morups Tange, Halland, Sweden (Stephan Johansson). Despite being a true *littoralis*, this individual looks pretty much identical to more than a few *petrosus*. Note how at this angle and under the lighting conditions the supercilium doesn't appear to be particularly strong.



Above: Scandinavian Rock Pipit (*littoralis*, same bird as above), Morups Tange, Halland, Sweden (Stephan Johansson). Here, in comparison with its appearance above, the supercilium appears to be more apparent when viewed head on!

Rock Pipit (*littoralis* and *petrosus*) in NON-BREEDING plumage



Above: Scandinavian Rock Pipit (*littoralis*), Getteron, Halland, Sweden (Stephan Johansson). This individual, another true *littoralis*, seems to lack any supercilium and looks particularly like most *petrosus*, proving just how extensive overlap in features is within each sub-species.



Above: Scandinavian Rock Pipit (*littoralis*), Getteron, Halland, Sweden (Stephan Johansson). Another true *littoralis* which could easily pass for either race.

IDENTIFICATION

Water Pipit (*spinoletta*) in NON-BREEDING plumage

The following table only outlines the features useful in the separation of *spinoletta* and *littoralis* in **non-breeding** plumage.

	<i>SPINOLETTA</i>	<i>LITTORALIS</i>
HEAD	Brown to grey/brown often paler and greyer than mantle; supercilium quite variable though more often distinct and whitish; dark malar stripe often not reaching to the base of the bill; eyering above the eye not conspicuous due to whiteness of supercilium.	Distinctly greenish tinged and concolourous with mantle and more often distinctly streaked; supercilium often distinct but not as clearly marked or extensive as <i>spinoletta</i> ; eyering often conspicuous above the eye.
UPPERPARTS	Usually warmer brown especially on the back, rump and upper-tail coverts; often contrastingly so with the less warm brown mantle; mantle slightly less obviously streaked.	Usually distinctly greenish tinged especially on the back, rump and upper-tail coverts; more obvious darker streaking on mantle.
UNDERPARTS	Base colour whitish (including the belly and under-tail coverts); breast and flanks distinctly streaked darker but streaks with sharper edges and never as messy as Rock Pipit especially on rear flanks; streaking density and size variable but most often much less heavily streaked and 'pencil thin'.	Base colour often more 'dirty' yellowish, consistently on the belly and under-tail coverts, throat especially can appear paler, more whitish; streaking larger and more diffuse especially on the rear flanks where they can become quite 'messy' and the base colour is more brownish/grey, often with a hint of warmth
WINGS	Edges to remiges usually browner, light-fawn to whitish; two distinct whitish wing bars formed by pale tips to the greater and median coverts.	Edges to remiges have a distinctly olive tone, especially on the tertials and primaries; wing bars often pale but rarely as distinct as <i>spinoletta</i> .
TAIL	Outer web to outer-tail feathers (t6) clearly and always white, inner webs with a clear cut, obvious large whitish wedge; t5 (second outer-most tail feathers) often have a small but obvious whitish wedge on the outer web and a fairly deep whitish wedge on the inner web.	Outer webs of t6 pale greyish/white, certainly appearing whitish in the field (especially towards the feather tip), inner webs appear less white and conspicuous; t5 with usually only a small dusky looking tip, never a deep pale wedge on the inner webs as in <i>spinoletta</i> .

CALL (relevant for all times of year)	To the experienced ear sounds slightly different from Rock Pipit and is in-between the latter and Meadow Pipit; slightly thinner, shorter and less harsh than Rock Pipit.	Differences to <i>spinoletta</i> very subtle but harsher, shriller.
BEHAVIOUR (relevant for all times of year but often subjective)	Usually very shy, flushing easily and at distance then circling round (usually then flying off behind the observer), 'dropping in' some distance away; often alights in bushes.	Less shy (some relatively tame), more prone to walk away or when flushed, fly directly away, alighting further along.

Water Pipit (*spinoletta*) in NON-BREEDING plumage



Above: Water Pipit (*spinoletta*), Getteron, Halland, Sweden (Stephan Johansson). The mantle is clearly warm brownish although on this individual the head is becoming markedly greyer (and thus contrasting with the mantle). Note also the very pale, whitish underparts, importantly including rear flanks and underpart streaking that is not only 'sparser' than that of Rock Pipit but is clearly smaller, narrower and more clearly defined. The malar stripe is poorly defined here and partially broken.

Water Pipit (*spinoletta*) in NON-BREEDING plumage



Above: Water Pipit (*spinoletta*; same individual as immediately above), Getteron, Halland, Sweden (Stephan Johansson). The brownness of the upperparts is obvious here as is the contrast to the greyish head.



Above: Water Pipit (*spinoletta*, left) and Meadow Pipit (*Anthus pratensis*, right), Getteron, Halland, Sweden (Stephan Johansson). The underpart streaking of this individual is fairly classic, although the apparent diffuseness on the flanks is more due to the 'fluffing out' of the feathers. This aside, the streaks are clearly defined and the belly is reasonably unstreaked. Also note how brown the upperparts are and compare them to those of the Meadow Pipit. In this individual the malar stripe is again typically poorly marked and does not reach the base of the bill.

Water Pipit (*spinoletta*) in NON-BREEDING plumage



Above: Water Pipit (*spinoletta*, same as immediately above), Getteron, Halland, Sweden (Stephan Johansson). Note how the rump is obviously warm brown and on this individual at least, concolourous with the rest of the upperparts, which are also rather inconspicuously streaked.



Above: Water Pipit (*spinoletta*), Getteron, Halland, Sweden (Stephan Johansson). An interesting bird due to the leucism across the forehead and throat (also present on the rear of the crown). The underpart streaking however is typical, with very fine and well defined flank streaks against a very pale, whitish ground colour across the entire underparts.

Water Pipit (*spinoletta*) in NON-BREEDING plumage



Above: Water Pipit (*spinoletta*), Queen Mother Reservoir, London (Jerry O'Brian). Rather warm brown, apparently unstreaked upperparts; bold supercilium; two fairly obvious white wing bars; whitish underparts with rather sparse, fine, well defined streaks; and a poorly marked malar stripe; all in all an absolute classic example of a non-breeding plumaged Water Pipit.



Above: 'Eastern' Water Pipit (*coutelli*), Bahrain (Adrian John Drummond-Hill). Whilst subtle differences exist between the races *coutelli* and *spinoletta* Water Pipits (not featured within the scope of this article), this bird still exhibits classic features existing in both; particularly here the fine and defined underpart streaking and large white supercilium.

Water Pipit (*spinoletta*) in NON-BREEDING plumage



Above: Non-breeding plumaged Water Pipits (*spinoletta*), The Manchester Museum, (Ian McKerchar). Notice the very pale, whitish ground colour of the underparts and the restricted, rather fine, distinct and sharply edged streaking on the breast, with fine, 'pencil streaking' on the flanks. The outer-tail feathers (t6) show a large and conspicuous area of white, especially on the inner webs.



Above: Non-breeding plumaged Water Pipits (left two, *spinoletta*) and Rock Pipits (right two, *littoralis/petrosus*), The Manchester Museum (Ian McKerchar). The difference in the shape, clarity and distribution of streaking on the underparts between the Water and Rock Pipits is immediately obvious, whilst the ground colour to the underparts of the Water Pipits are clearly paler/whiter. Note again the large and conspicuous white wedges on the inner webs of the outer-tail feathers on the Water Pipits.



Above: Non-breeding plumaged Water Pipit (left, *spinoletta*) and Rock Pipit (right, *petrosus*), The Manchester Museum (Ian McKerchar). The much warmer brown upperparts, including very importantly the back, rump and upper-tail coverts on the Water Pipit are obvious, whilst those of this Rock Pipit (a specimen from St.Kilda) are rather greyish/olive with quite large and distinct streaking. Note the buffish outer-tail feathers on this particular Rock Pipit.



Above: Water Pipit (left, *spinoletta*) and Scandinavian Rock Pipit (right, *littoralis*), The Manchester Museum (Ian McKerchar). The outer-tail feather (t6) of the *spinoletta* appears white on both webs and the second-to-outer feather (t5) displays the large and characteristic clear white 'wedge' on the inner web and a small whitish tip to the outer web but to be fair, t6 on the *littoralis* also appears similarly as white (albeit with a slightly more greyish-white outer web) but t5 typically has an all brownish tip to the outer web and very little paler wedge on the inner web. In the field though, on a live bird jumping and hopping about, could you differentiate them with sufficient certainty?

IDENTIFICATION

Rock Pipit (*littoralis* and *petrosus*) in BREEDING plumage

The following table only outlines the features useful in the separation of *petrosus* and *littoralis* in **breeding** plumage.

	<i>PETROSUS</i>	<i>LITTORALIS</i>
HEAD	Never as grey, nor the supercilium usually as distinct, as <i>littoralis</i> although those on bleached and worn summer birds may be prominent.	Some birds, particularly from March onwards, can attain a particularly pure grey head and display a prominent (occasionally very so) pale supercilium, although quite often it is rather poorly defined and less prominent in front of the eyes.
MANTLE	Usually typical olive-grey although a small minority attain some purer grey on the nape, hind neck and mantle (some occasionally approaching <i>littoralis</i> in this respect).	As with the head, often a more extensive purer grey on the mantle and hind neck.
UNDERPARTS	Heavily streaked and coloured as in non-breeding plumage but although a small minority can show some slight peachy-buff on the breast it is never as extreme as that in <i>littoralis</i> ; bleached and worn summer birds can often appear very pale on the underparts, particularly on the throat area.	Particularly variable with rarer extreme birds often resembling <i>spinoletta</i> in having significantly reduced breast streaking (occasionally even completely lacking, usually leaving only fairly heavily streaked flanks) and a conspicuous pinkish wash to the breast (occasionally even more extensive); most individuals however have reduced breast streaking appearing almost 'spotted' with a peachy-buff wash; whereas other birds still display heavy streaking although slightly less 'messy' than <i>petrosus</i> .

Rock Pipit (*littoralis* and *petrosus*) in BREEDING plumage



Above: Scandinavian Rock Pipit (*littoralis*, same individual), Covenham Reservoir, March 1998 (Roy Harvey). This bird was quite understandably initially mis-identified as a Water Pipit and the almost pinkish flush on the breast is indeed quite strong and extensive. The breast streaking is much reduced and the head appears greyish but this individual is infact a fairly classic more 'extreme' *littoralis*. The streaking on the flanks is remains typically Rock Pipit, rather bold and diffuse; the mantle and scapulars are greyish (not browner) and lack contrast with the head that would be expected with Water Pipit; the malar stripe and patch are quite obvious; and whilst the supercilium appears strongly white, it is only so from above and behind the eye.



Above: Scandinavian Rock Pipit (*littoralis*), Brockholes Quarry, Lancashire, March 2006 (Bill Aspin). The underparts of this individual are paler than would be perhaps expected on any *petrosus*; the throat is beginning to attain a peachy tone; the supercilium is very strong and whitish from above and behind the eye; the breast streaking is reduced across the breast and appears almost spotted; and the mantle, scapulars and particularly the head are certainly greyer than might be expected from most *petrosus*.

Rock Pipit (*littoralis* and *petrosus*) in BREEDING plumage



Above: Scandinavian Rock Pipit (*littoralis*), Harrold and Odell Country Park, Bedfordshire, March 2004 (Steve Blain). A typical individual: - greyish head, mantle and scapulars and obvious supercilium especially from above and behind the eye.



Above: Scandinavian Rock Pipit (*littoralis*, same individual as immediately above), Harrold and Odell Country Park, Bedfordshire, March 2004 (Steve Blain). The breast streaking is clearly much reduced and appears spotted rather than streaked (although still far too 'messy' and diffuse along the flanks for Water Pipit) and a peachy-buff hue is evident. Note the white looking throat and obvious malar stripe and patch.

Rock Pipit (*littoralis* and *petrosus*) in BREEDING plumage



Above: Scandinavian Rock Pipit (*littoralis*), Lynemouth, Northumberland, March 2005 (Alan Gilbertson). Not dissimilar to the Bedfordshire bird below, this bird appears grey on the head, mantle and scapulars; rather pale on the underparts (especially the throat); displays an obvious whitish supercilium (still most obvious from above and behind the eye); has fairly conspicuous pale wing bars; and has reduced streaking across the breast. Note how broad, diffuse and messy the flank streaking is in relation to those of Water Pipit and the underpart ground colour is a dirty, off-white with a distinct brownish tone around the rear flanks.



Above: Scandinavian Rock Pipit (*littoralis*), Blackstone Edge Reservoir, Greater Manchester, March 2007 (Sean Gray). Yet another bird which caused initial confusion. This *littoralis* exhibits underpart streaking far too strong and extensive for any Water Pipit; the supercilium is very prominent although mainly above and behind

the eye, as is the malar stripe that reaches the base of the bill; whilst the head, mantle and scapulars are very greyish. The wing bars, especially on the median coverts, look very white and prominent.

Rock Pipit (*littoralis and petrosus*) in BREEDING plumage



Above: Scandinavian Rock Pipit (*littoralis*, same individual as immediately above), Blackstone Edge Reservoir, Greater Manchester, 30.03.07 (Sean Gray). The outer-tail feathers appeared quite pale on this individual and after careful observation were said to be buffish/white, although initially they appeared plain whitish (and hence caused confusion) and the breast, although not evident in these images, was noticeably pinkish (David Winnard pers comm. and Simon Hitchen in litt.). The greyish mantle and scapulars are concolourous with the head, unlike the contrast expected with the brownish mantle and greyish head of Water Pipit.



Left: Scandinavian Rock Pipit (*littoralis*, same individual as preceding two), Blackstone Edge Reservoir, Greater Manchester, March 2007 (Sean Gray). Whilst the exact colour of the back, rump and upper-tail coverts here is difficult to perceive, it clearly has an olive hue and most certainly not the obvious, often contrastingly warm brownish hue, exhibited by Water Pipit. **As the area of the rump is usually concealed by the wings it is least susceptible to colour fade and wear and remains a key feature in separating difficult and faded individuals.** Note how in this image the outer web to the outer-tail feather (t6) appears whitish.

Rock Pipit (*littoralis* and *petrosus*) in BREEDING plumage



Above two and below one images: Scandinavian Rock Pipit (*littoralis*), Audenshaw Reservoirs, April 2006 (Rob Adderley). This bird was quite controversial at the time and was originally identified as a Water Pipit. Most of the confusion seems to have arisen from the bird's apparently very white outer-tail feathers and they certainly appear so from these images. Despite my initial suspicions of the very bright conditions the photos were taken in affecting the colouration of the images (considering the very white looking edge to the first tertial in the first image and the 'Persil' whiteness of the droppings on the wall in the two images below), field observations seem to back up the outer-tail feathers actually being white (Rob Adderley, pers comm.). Of course, the outer-tails feathers of *littoralis* are often much paler and whiter in appearance than *petrosus* anyway, and I am conscious of the difficulty of perceiving true white under the challenge of field conditions but either way, this bird has a full suite of pro-*littoralis* features. Note its rather greyish nape, mantle and scapulars; reduced breast streaking yet with flank streaking still slightly too large and diffuse for Water Pipit (and clearly extending well onto the belly); a slightly brownish wash to the very rear flanks a peachy-buff wash on the breast; strong, pale supercilium (mostly above and behind the eye); and very prominent malar stripes (clearly reaching the base of the bill) and patches. Numbering the tail feathers from the images is never going to be easy

and is subject to some personal opinion but whilst the outer-tail feather (t6) has what appears to be a clear white edge, it would seem that t5 lacks any white wedge.



Above: Rock Pipit (*petrosus*), Portland, Dorset, May 2006 (Chris Cook). A true *petrosus*, this rather bleached individual clearly displays a prominent supercilium; apparent whitish outer-tail feathers (although lighting effects may certainly be playing their part here); and is much paler on the underparts, especially the throat. It still has the *petrosus* characteristically strong and messy underpart streaking but from this angle appears quite brown on the upperparts, reinforcing the need for caution when assessing poorly seen birds and/or single images.

IDENTIFICATION

Water Pipit (*spinoletta*) in BREEDING plumage

The following table outlines the potential features useful in the separation of *spinoletta* and *littoralis* in **breeding** plumage.

	<i>SPINOLETTA</i>	<i>LITTORALIS</i>
HEAD	Grey to greyish/brown with a distinct and sharply defined (sometimes flared) whitish supercilium in most (but not all!); malar stripe and patch usually absent or very faint; throat whitish but may even be washed brownish/pink.	Can be quite greyish with a distinct pale supercilium although very rarely as distinct or sharply defined and occasionally flared as <i>spinoletta</i> ; that of <i>littoralis</i> is more often poorly marked and less obvious in front of the eye; malar stripe and patch often still relatively prominent, the former reaching the base of the bill.
UPPERPARTS	Greyish/brown to purer grey on mantle and scapulars and may show diffuse slightly darker streaks but often looks entirely plain; back, rump and upper-tail coverts unstreaked and much more obviously warmer brown, often contrastingly so against the slightly greyer mantle.	May appear quite pure grey on the mantle and scapulars (especially in extreme birds); usually more obviously darker streaked on the mantle (and often faintly so on the back) but the back, rump and upper-tail coverts usually always show the characteristic greenish hue.
UNDERPARTS	Breast, belly and upper flanks pinkish (of variable intensity); rest of underparts whitish, although breast streaking variable with some individuals still retaining some remnants; many have underpart streaking entirely absent.	Although reduced breast streaking and pinkish colouration can sometimes approach that of some <i>spinoletta</i> , still has at least some typically diffuse and messy flank streaks; base colouration appearing less white than <i>spinoletta</i> .
WINGS	Remiges lack olive tones, edges usually warmer, buffish to almost whitish.	Usually definite olive tones to the edges of the tertials, some greater coverts and primaries.

It is also worth bearing in mind that a small minority of Water Pipits appear to remain in non-breeding (like) plumage throughout the year and do not attain the characteristic breeding plumage even on the breeding grounds.

Water Pipit (*spinoletta*) in BREEDING plumage



Above: Water Pipits (*spinoletta*), Warton Bank, Lancashire, March 2002 (Bill Aspin). The individuals in both upper two images have attained almost full breeding plumage apart from one or two characteristically fine and well defined streaks on the underparts. Both birds are beautifully coloured with a greyish head complete with a large and 'full' supercilium and brightly coloured pinkish on the throat and breast; note the absence of any malar stripes or patches. The bird in the lower image is still moulting but displays similar features without the pinkish on the underparts; note the strong supercilium in front of the eye.

Water Pipit (*spinoletta*) in BREEDING plumage



Above: Water Pipit (*spinoletta*), Broome Gravel Pits, Bedfordshire, April 2002 (Steve Blain). The flank streaking still visible here is typically fine and distinct, unlike that of Rock Pipit; the head is very greyish and appears unstreaked; and the bird lacks any malar stripe.



Above: Water Pipit (*spinoletta*, same individual as above), Broome Gravel Pits, Bedfordshire, April 2002 (Steve Blain). Note the broad supercilium; typical flank streaks; and especially the characteristic warm brownish back, rump upper-tail coverts and (slightly more greyish/brown) mantle, which contrasts well against the purer greyish head.

Water Pipit (*spinoletta*) in BREEDING plumage



Above: Water Pipit (*spinoletta*, same individual as above), Broome Gravel Pits, Bedfordshire, April 2002 (Steve Blain). A handsome bird in breeding plumage, even in this pose the bird displays the pro-*spinoletta* characteristics of a broad and full whitish supercilium; no malar stripe or patch; and the rear flanks streaks, only just visible here, are still typical and obviously set against a white ground colour. The rump feathering, just exposed slightly underneath the primaries, also appears typically warm brown.



Above: Breeding plumaged Water Pipits (left three *spinoletta*, right two *coutelli*), The Manchester Museum (Ian McKerchar). All these birds have obtained their distinctive pinkish underparts which are more extensive than on *littoralis*, although a few still have remnants of breast streaks.

Water Pipit (*spinoletta*) in BREEDING plumage



Above: Breeding plumaged Water Pipits (*spinoletta*), The Manchester Museum (Ian McKerchar). Even on these skins the contrast between the greyish head and the warmer brown mantle is obvious.



Above: Breeding plumaged Water Pipit (left, *spinoletta*) and Scandinavian Rock Pipit (right, *littoralis*, a specimen from Norway in June), The Manchester Museum (Ian McKerchar). Both pipits still have remnants of breast streaking, although that on the *littoralis* still appears larger and less well defined. The flank streaking (especially visible on both left sides of the skins) is clearly fine and well defined on the *spinoletta* whilst those on the *littoralis* are broader, less well defined around the edges and more extensive along the flanks.

Water Pipit (*spinoletta*) in BREEDING plumage



Above: Breeding plumaged Water Pipit (*spinoletta*, left) and Scandinavian Rock Pipit (*littoralis*, right, same pair as above), The Manchester Museum (Ian McKerchar). On this close up of the breast and head the pinkish colouration on the breast is more intense around the very upper-breast on the *littoralis* and is actually more peachy-buff; yet on the *spinoletta* is more evenly distributed and a purer pink. The *littoralis* still has conspicuous malar stripes clearly reaching the base of the bill, whilst the *spinoletta* has a clear, white throat.



Above and just out of interest, The Manchester Museum (Ian McKerchar)! Although the identification of Buff-bellied Pipit is outside the intended scope of this article, compare for yourself the underpart colouration and streaking of these non-breeding plumaged pipits, from left to right: Water Pipit (*spinoletta*), Rock Pipit (*petrosus*), Siberian Buff-bellied Pipit (*japonicus*) and American Buff-bellied Pipit (*rubescens*).

SUMMARY

Whilst safely identifying Rock Pipits to either *petrosus* or *littoralis* might be practically impossible in most cases, at least some spring birds are readily separable with confidence and any confusion between these birds and Water Pipit should be relatively easily cleared up with some careful, prolonged field study. As always, field experience remains key and observers should take every opportunity to thoroughly familiarise themselves with each species and race at every opportunity; no more shall we ignore those 'little brown jobs'.

Acknowledgements

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www.homepages.mcb.net/wormwell/Littoralis.pdf - excellent article on the identification of Scandinavian Rock Pipit by Chris Wormwell.

www.fyldebirdclub.org/warton_pipit_page.htm - great reference for Rock and Water Pipits with many photographs.

Ian McKerchar, July 2007

manchesterbirding.com