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On western Palaearctic *Anthus pratensis* (Linnaeus)

by P. A. CLANCEY

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Kenneth Williamson, *Bird Migration*, vol. i, 2, 1959, pp. 88–91, discusses once again the geographical variation exhibited by the western Palaearctic populations of the Meadow Pipit *Anthus pratensis* (Linnaeus), 1758: Sweden, recognising the richly coloured insular populations of Iceland, the Faeroes, and, presumably, "Highland" Britain as subspecifically discrete under the name *A. p. theresae* Meinertzhagen, 1953: Achill Island, western Ireland. Earlier but purely taxonomic papers dealing with the same question are those of Clancey, *Bull. B.O.C.*, vol. lxiii, 1942, pp. 6, 7; *ibid.*, vol. lxviii, 1948, pp. 54–56; and Meinertzhagen, *ibid.*, vol. lxxiii, 1953, p. 43. Vaurie, *Birds of the Palearctic Fauna*, 1959, p. 69, admits the distinction of *A. p. theresae*, the range of which he restricts, following Meinertzhagen, *loc. cit.*, to "Western Ireland", while *A. p. whistleri* Clancey, 1942: Dornoch, Sutherlandshire, northern Scotland, is placed in the synonymy of *A. p. pratensis*.

As correctly pointed out by Williamson in his valuable paper the two names listed above are available for the saturated, western, "Atlantic" populations of this common pipit, but he has unnecessarily complicated the issue by claiming that the *Type* of *A. p. whistleri* is subspecifically indeterminate, and that the name for the enlarged western insular race should be the much later *A. p. theresae*. I believe that there are solid grounds for questioning the validity of the claim that the name *A. p. whistleri* is inapplicable to the western, "Atlantic" race of the Meadow Pipit.

A. p. whistleri was described during the darkest days of the War years on the basis of a comparison between series of freshly moulted autumn and breeding birds collected in the Dornoch district of south-eastern Sutherlandshire in 1938 (August-September) and 1942 (June), and the limited Continental material at that time available in the collections of the British Museum (Nat. Hist.) and Dr. James M. Harrison, of Sevenoaks. It is of importance to note that much of the paratypical series of *A. p. whistleri* consisted of actual breeding birds shot at the type-locality in June, 1942, so that as far as the differential diagnosis is concerned, *A. p. whistleri* is a name correctly given to the breeding Meadow Pipit of the Scottish Highlands and no other. Indeed, the distinctions given for *A. p. whistleri* in the original description are mainly those to be discerned in a critical study of breeding material, though later work on *A. p. whistleri* and *A. p. pratensis* has shown that by far the best and most reliable racial characters separating these two forms are to be seen in autumn-taken birds.

Williamson bases his main argument in favour of synonymizing *A. p. whistleri* on the assumption that the paratypical series was a composite of two distinct geographical races, and that the *Type* of *whistleri* is like Swedish topotypes of the nominate race in juvenile dress. That such a view is scientifically admissible is open to grave doubt. The *Type*, which is in the Clancey Collection, now in the Royal Scottish Museum, Edinburgh, is a bird of the year in the final stages of transitional moult from juvenile to first-winter plumage, and has most of the head, and the whole of the back, body-plumage, wings and tail more or less completely moulted through. It is quite incorrect to state that this *Type*—the actual name-bearer—is largely in juvenile dress and to compare it with others in such plumage. I agree that we cannot be absolutely certain in the light of our new knowledge on migration that this bird was hatched from a nest in the type-locality in the north of Scotland, but the inescapable indications are that it was. To argue speciously against the validity or applicability of the name *whistleri* on the questionable belief that the bird concerned was indigenous to continental Europe and not Scotland, seems both unsound and unnecessary, especially when the specimen is in a perfectly adequate condition to confirm its initial allocation by me to the western race, of which it is now the *Holotype*. As recently as the autumn of 1958 I compared this very *Type* with the rest of the enormous series of *A. pratensis* now available for systematic work in Edinburgh, and can confirm that it agrees perfectly in the rich rufous olivaceous mantle colouration and pinkish under-parts with a host of other autumn specimens of the occidental race of Meadow Pipit, and not with the rather greener backed and whiter bellied *A. p. pratensis*, which latter race occurs plentifully in the British Isles, as a breeding form in southern and south-eastern England, and as a general winter visitor and passage migrant.

It is satisfactory to see recent work confirm my earlier and officially rejected (*sic*) findings on subspecific variation in the western Palaearctic populations of *A. pratensis*. I submit, however, that the correct name for Williamson's "Atlantic" race of Meadow Pipit is actually *A. p. whistleri*, as argued above, and not the later *A. p. theresae*, which name should now be placed in the synonymy of the former.

Study of the material preserved in the collections of the museums in Stockholm, Copenhagen and Edinburgh in the autumn of 1958 revealed that the range of *A. p. whistleri* is much wider than formerly believed, the race concerned ranging from Iceland and the Faroes to Scotland and Isles, the moorlands of northern and western England, Wales, Isle of Man and Ireland. Specimens from Greenland in the collection of the University Zoological Museum in Copenhagen are referable to the nominate race.

On western Palaearctic *Anthus pratensis* (Linnaeus)

by KENNETH WILLIAMSON

Received 16th June, 1960

I am grateful to Mr. Phillip Clancey for allowing me to see his note on Meadow Pipits, about which I have the following comments to make:—

the two collections of August–September 1938 and June 1942, though om the same district of south-east Sutherland, cannot be considered

together, for two reasons. Firstly, although the second collection must assuredly represent breeding-birds, Meadow Pipits in June are much too worn and bleached for critical taxonomic assessment. Secondly, the early onset of Meadow Pipit migration through the British Isles leaves us with no guarantee that the August–September collection of 1938 comprises native birds. It may well do so, but of this we cannot be certain. The facts of the case are that a bird which still has a good deal of juvenile plumage (and is quite inseparable from birds of similar age from Sweden, Iceland, the Outer Hebrides, Argyllshire and Lancashire) was selected as type, and the original description clearly refers to this indeterminate juv. > 1st. winter phase and says nothing about the greater saturation of colour above and below which distinguishes the Atlantic race. Thus, whilst it is abundantly clear that Mr. Clancey was the first to appreciate that two distinct populations of Meadow Pipit are present in the British area in autumn, it is unfortunate that he did not revise his diagnosis before Meinertzhagen described—correctly—*A. p. theresae*. As matters stand today, the name *whistleri* is technically a synonym of *pratensis*, and we are left with no option but to use *theresae* for the Atlantic race.

A comparative study of the method of skull pneumatisation in certain birds

by JEFFERY G. HARRISON

Received 10th June, 1960

PART TWO

Method of Pneumatisation in the Starling.

There is very little difference in the method of pneumatisation in the early stages of the Starling compared with the House Sparrow, the difference being in stages 11–13 of the Starling, where the two "windows" in the frontal bones divide into four, stages which were not found by either Nero or myself in the House Sparrow.

The time factor. Ten immature Starlings examined on 2nd October were already fully pneumatised. Assuming that such birds were hatched in early May, this would indicate pneumatisation occurring in approximately five months, but nine others on the same date still possessed "windows" four of them being only half pneumatised. Probably therefore, six months would be the average time as for the House Sparrow.

Method of Pneumatisation in certain Corvidae.

This series of skulls demonstrates that the Carrion Crow, Rook, Jackdaw and Jay pneumatise by the same method and the smaller number of Magpies suggests that they also conform to this method. The method is unlike any of the others studied, notably in stages 9–18, while the last remaining pair of "windows" (17–18) are more centrally placed in the frontal bones than the equivalent "windows" in Starlings and House Sparrows and more irregular than in the pigeons.

The diagram showing the method of skull pneumatisation includes several alternative methods, as is indicated by the arrows. The following table gives the number and species examined, corresponding to the stages illustrated. Stage 19 represents the point at which pneumatisation has just reached completion, the outline of the last remaining "windows" to