

# First record of Buff-bellied Pipit *Anthus (rubescens) japonicus* for Turkey

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On 22 November 2008 we were birdwatching on the coast at Milleyha, near Samandağ, 25 km southwest of Antakya city, Turkey. Milleyha is a small wetland on the eastern coast of the Mediterranean, 200 m from the sea, and is covered by reed beds, seasonal flood plains and salt marshes.

At c09.30 h, we observed a Buff-bellied Pipit *Anthus (rubescens) japonicus* (Plate 1). It was feeding on the mud near the water's edge together with Kentish Plovers *Charadrius alexandrinus*, Dunlins *Calidris alpina*, Little Stints *Calidris minuta* and a few Meadow Pipits *Anthus pratensis*. The weather was clear and bright, with occasional patches of cloud. The wind was light and from the north. We observed the bird for c35 minutes through binoculars and a telescope. The light was mainly on the birds, depending on the angle from where we stood. The bird was 40 m from us and we photographed it (digiscoped) from different angles. We observed the Buff-bellied Pipit again the following month, on 11 December, during our observations in the same area (we also saw 5 Richard's Pipits *Anthus richardi* that day).

## DESCRIPTION & DISCUSSION

The bird appeared chubbier than the Meadow Pipits and the most notable characteristic was the dense black spotting on its white breast which joined at the sides of the neck making bigger spots. The spots were thinner on its chest and reached almost to its undertail coverts. Its back was uniform dark brown and unpatterned except for a few indistinct spots. There was a distinct contrast between wing bars, formed by pale edges of wing coverts, and the general dark plumage. The legs were dark brown. The most distinctive characteristic of the head was the pale lores. The eye ring was also distinctive and the cheek dark. The short supercilium ended just behind the eye.

Buff-bellied Pipit can be confused with Water Pipit *Anthus spinoletta*. However, Buff-bellied Pipit has better defined and denser spots on the breast and flanks. Additionally, the legs are dark reddish-brown, the supercilium ends just behind the eye and the darker cheeks are all noteworthy features for separating the two species (Porter *et al* 1996, Svensson *et al* 1999).

There are two races of Buff-bellied Pipit: *rubescens* which breeds in North America and west Greenland and *japonicus* which breeds in north-east Russia. *A. (rubescens)*



**Plate 1.** Buff-bellied Pipit *Anthus (rubescens) japonicus*, 22 November 2008, Milleyha, near Samandağ, Antakya, Turkey. © Ali Atahan

*japonicus* winters mainly in Japan, Taiwan and south-east China. There are regular winter records from Pakistan and southern Israel (Cramp 1998), and it is winter vagrant to Oman (Balmer & Betton 2006) and UAE (Balmer & Betton 2008).

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