

## PIPITS AND WAGTAILS — FAMILY MOTACILLIDAE

### Red-throated Pipit *Anthus cervinus*

An Old World species, the Red-throated Pipit barely crosses the Bering Strait as a breeding bird to reach the coast of western Alaska. Yet it is remarkably regular, almost annual, as a fall vagrant to California, the most frequent Asian songbird in the lower 48 states. In California, the Red-throated Pipit's habits and habitats are similar to those of the American Pipit, and it often flocks with that species.

**Migration:** In San Diego County, the Red-throated Pipit has been found in 21 of the 40 years from 1964, when McCaskie (1966a) first discovered it, through 2003. Almost all the birds have been in cultivated fields in the Tijuana River valley, the only exceptions being two at Point Loma (S7; 25–28 October 1981, D. Rawlins, Binford 1985; 27 September 2003, S. E. Smith), one at Kate Sessions Park (Q8; 21 October–27 November 2003, C. G. Edwards), and one in the floodplain of San Mateo Creek at San Onofre State Beach (C1; 13 October 1995, R. A. Erickson, NASFN 50:116, 1996). Occasionally multiple Red-throateds are found together; the largest numbers recorded in a year are 10 in 1966 and 1967, 12 in 1964, and 15 in 1991. Until 2003, the occurrences were clustered in an interval only 38 days long from 4 October (1994) to 11 November



Photo by Brian L. Sullivan

(1991). The three preserved specimens were collected 13 October 1964 (SDNHM 35097, MVZ 145172) and 19 October 1966 (LACM 46029).

**Conservation:** In California, Red-throated Pipits occur largely in agricultural fields along the coast—a land use being ousted by urbanization. In the Tijuana River valley the only habitat remaining are fields of sod, an environment sterile in comparison to the fields of alfalfa, tomato, and other crops that the birds once visited.