



Illustrations of American Pipit, left, and Sprague's Pipit, right, copyrighted by and printed here with permission by Dr. George C. West, Birchside Studios, www.birchsidestudios.com.

Note the American Pipit's thin, longitudinal streaking as opposed to the Sprague's Pipit, with streaking more concentrated on the breast.

Though you will likely never see these birds side by side in the field in Illinois, you can look at their breast markings to help with identification.

association with several Savannah Sparrows (*Passerculus sandwichensis*). The birds sought the thicker tufts of grass to avoid the extremely windy conditions. When flushed, the first two birds did not call nor fly very far and resettled only a few yards opposite my position. I was able to observe them briefly in flight and then leisurely on the ground as they moved ahead of me keeping a safe distance. After several repeated flushes, the first two birds remained well hidden and could not be located. The third bird flushed at my feet and called loudly. Because of the wind, I had pulled my hood up over my head, which obscured my peripheral vision. Therefore, when the bird flushed, I was unable to locate it in flight. Keith McMullen and I returned to the pasture the following morning, but we could not find any pipits. On the return trip the winds were even stronger and from the opposite direction. The strong winds may have prompted the birds to select another field or to move on.

On 20 April 2008, Mark Seiffert and I went to look for a Sprague's Pipit in Clinton County. Mark Seiffert went to great lengths with a county plat book to seek out properties that would allow us access to their fields. We selected a huge field with an unusually large crown. It seemed ideal as it had corn stubble from the previous fall, some sections of clover and alfalfa, and best of all, vehicle-sized lanes of fescue to prevent erosion. We drove to the crest of the field and began walking through the clover and alfalfa. Large numbers of Savannah Sparrows were present, likely a good

We began our search in the pasture where Travis and I had located the bird in November 2006 and walked for quite a while without any luck. We were probably too spread out and had we flushed a pipit, we would not have been able to get the entire group on the bird. We moved to another nearby pasture, this time flushing two Sprague's Pipits. Quite luckily, as we advanced from the road into the pasture, we were funneled to a lane of fescue leading to a large dove hunting field within the park. The first bird flushed within a few feet of my position as I entered the lane. It called loudly and repeatedly, but not as loud as my attempt to get the group on the bird. Ideally, the sun was at our back, and we could plainly see the bold white outer tail feathers as the bird spiraled high into the sky. It climbed in a wide circling pattern as if it were looking for a good place to land. I continually called out its position to make sure the group was on the bird. I got a few positive responses and alerted them to anticipate the dramatic dive as this species falls from the sky to land. I had not yet observed this behavior, but knew well

enough what to expect. When you do see it, you are left with little doubt as to the identity of the bird. We marked the spot where the bird landed with intents on flushing it again. On a hunch, I continued down the grassy lane hoping for another pipit. I took only a few more steps and another Sprague's Pipit called as it flushed. We watched it as before, but this bird flushed in the opposite direction and was backlit. With the rolling contour of the strip mines, we were unable to view the dramatic descent as the pipit flew beyond our horizon. We went into the pasture to look for the first pipit, but were unable to relocate it. My next encounter with this species was on 21 March 2008. I returned to the Denmark Unit of Pyramid State Park. March may be the early window for this species, but a search on this date was justified by two other records – 16 March 1957 (Gallatin County) and 19 March 2006 (Fulton County). I entered the same field as the observations from the previous fall and flushed three Sprague's Pipits. Although all three birds were observed in the same field, they flushed separately and seemed to be in loose