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## Birds of the Great Plains: Family Motacillidae (Wagtails and Pipits)

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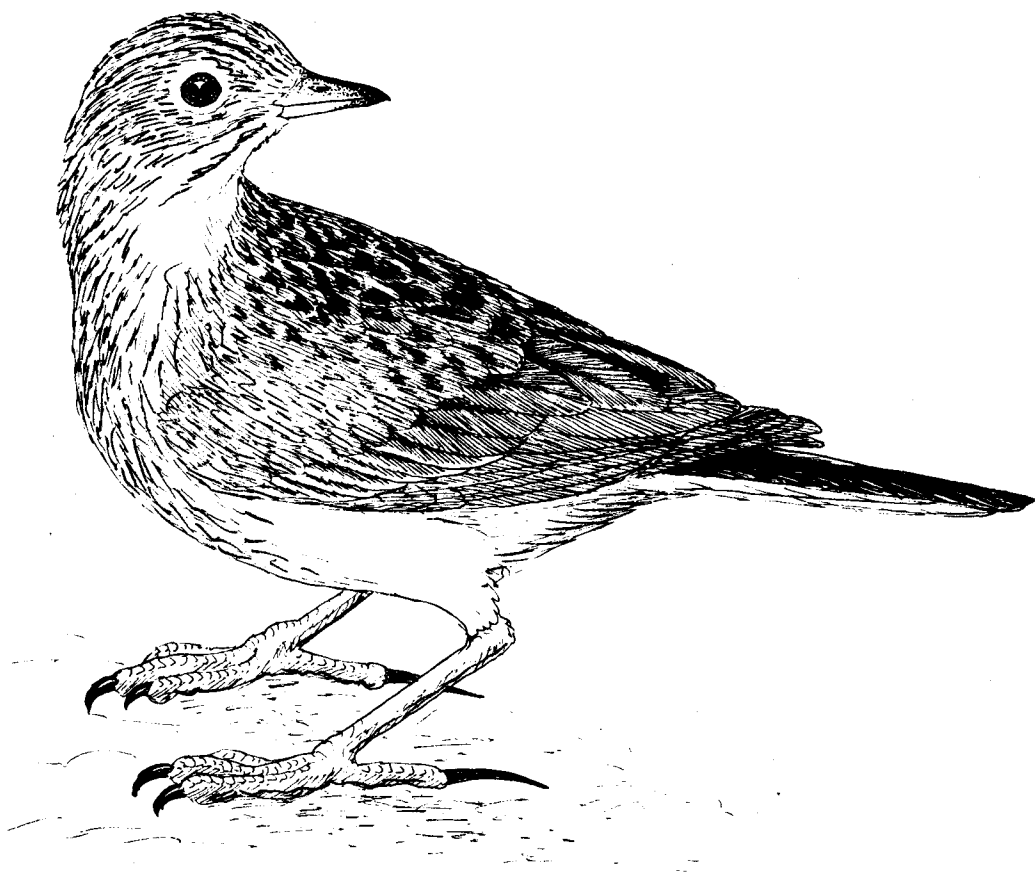
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**FAMILY MOTACILLIDAE  
(WAGTAILS AND PIPITS)**



Sprague Pipit

## Sprague Pipit

*Anthus spragueii*

**Breeding Status:** Breeds primarily in North Dakota (except for the extreme northeast and southeast). Also breeds in adjacent Minnesota (all recent records from Clay County, earlier ones for Kittson, Pennington, and Marshall counties), and in northern South Dakota (south to Corson and possibly Dewey counties).

**Breeding Habitat:** The Sprague pipit is a prairie species associated with extensive areas of grassland dominated by grasses of medium height. The birds also breed in large alkaline meadows and locally in the meadow zones of larger alkali lakes.

**Nest Location:** Nests are in hollows on the ground, in clumps of grasses or grasslike plants. The nest is constructed entirely of grasses, circularly arranged, without any additional lining.

**Clutch Size and Incubation Period:** From 4 to 6 eggs (4 North Dakota clutches averaged 4.5). The eggs are grayish white with blotches of purplish brown. The incubation period is unreported, but in related species it is 13-14 days. Probably double-brooded.

**Time of Breeding:** North Dakota egg dates are from June 7 to June 30, but nestlings have been seen as late as August 2, suggesting that renesting or double-brooding may occur.

**Breeding Biology:** Like several other prairie-adapted species, this bird has inconspicuous plumage but a beautiful and spectacular song-flight display, in which it sings a series of two-note phrases as it rises in the air and is silent as it descends. Thus the song is heard periodically as the bird moves in a circular pattern over its territory. It is probable that the female does all the incubating, since she does all the brooding. It has been suggested, however, that the male takes charge of the first brood after they have left the nest at about 12 days of age, so that the female is able to begin a second clutch almost immediately. After the breeding season is over the young and adults gather in large flocks, often with horned larks and longspurs, and gradually begin to move southward.

**Suggested Reading:** Roberts 1932; Bent 1950.

