

Water Pipit *Anthus spinoletta spinoletta* (Linnaeus, 1758) (Aves Motacillidae) actively feeding on small fishes

Arnaldo Camilloni¹, Raffaele Luca², Roberto Casalini³ & Andrea Corso^{4*}

¹Via Antonio Rosmini 5, 00033 Cave, Rome, Italy; email: arnaldocam@alice.it

²Via Morino 78, 00033 Cave, Rome, Italy; email: raffo1265@gmail.com

³Museo Civico di Zoologia, Via Ulisse Aldrovandi 18, 00197 Rome, Italy; email: roberto.casalini@comune.roma.it

⁴Via Camastra 10, 96100 Siracusa, Italy; email: zoologywp@gmail.com

*Corresponding author

ABSTRACT

In this paper, the Authors observed and photographically documented some Water Pipits *Anthus spinoletta spinoletta* (Linnaeus, 1758) (Aves Motacillidae) feeding on alive small fishes, *Aphanius fasciatus* (Valenciennes, 1821) of the Cyprinodontidae family, at Pantani dell'Inferno, Circeo National Park (Lazio, Italy).

KEY WORDS

Circeo National Park; ecology; Water Pipit.

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INTRODUCTION

During December 2016, two of us (ACa, RLu) repeatedly observed some Water Pipits *Anthus spinoletta spinoletta* (Linnaeus, 1758) (Aves Motacillidae) feeding on alive small fishes at Pantani dell'Inferno, Circeo National Park (Lazio, Central Italy). The birds walking in very shallow water, actively sought small fry, which were caught and swallowed entirely. The observation was repeated in several occasions and photographically documented. Despite this passerine winters regularly all over the Italian Peninsula, as being also a breeding species and partial migrant, such a behaviour was never recorded before anywhere in the country.

For that reason, we believe is of interest reporting now our observations.

RESULTS AND CONCLUSIONS

From mid to late December 2016, regular visits

to the shallow, brakish retrodunal ponds of the wetlands complex of Circeo National Park (Latina, Lazio, Italy), in the locality called Pantani dell'Inferno, gave the opportunity to observe several Water Pipits at very close range, therefore obtaining a number of close up photographs.

Once the last two authors of this short note (RC and ACo) received the photographs, realised that the catching of alive fishes by the species was something probably never reported before or at least rather unusual. The small fry were identified as Mediterranean Killifish or South European Toothcarp *Aphanius fasciatus* (Valenciennes, 1821), a fish of the Cyprinodontidae family, endemic to the Mediterranean basin, where it is found in most countries but the Iberian Peninsular (Bianco, 1995; Duchi & Maino, 2013). Its natural habitats are saline lakes, brakish marshes, and coastal saline lagoons or salt-pans (Bianco, 1995; Leonardos, 2008; Lo Duca & Marrone, 2009). Both Glutz von Blotzheim & Bauer (1985) and Cramp (1988) report only occasional feeding on dead fishes found



Figures 1–3. *Anthus spinoletta spinoletta* fishing and eating *Aphanius fasciatus* at Pantani dell’Inferno (Lazio, Italy) (Fig. 1 by A. Camilloni; Figs. 2, 3 by R. Luca).

along bank shores, while Alström et al. (2003) mention fishes as prey for some Motacillidae, without further information on which species. However, Fikkert (2013) reports the first and so far the previously only known case of fishing Water Pipit, concerning a single bird observed in the Netherlands, catching, killing and eating fishes. This author, mentions the killing of 16 small fishes, with a length of about 4 cm each, identified as belonging to three species: Eurasian Perch *Perca fluviatilis* (Linnaeus, 1758), Sunbleak *Leucaspius delineatus* (Heckel, 1843) and Nine-spined Stickleback *Pungitius pungitius* (Linnaeus, 1758).

Our observations regard seven fishes rapidly molested and eaten by the Water Pipits, and constitute, up to date, the second ever published evidence of fish-eating and the first regarding the Mediterranean area.

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