

Meadow Pipit

Winkler and Jenni pp 41-42

Basics: Postjuvenile moult comprises body-feathers, and to a variable extent coverts, tertials and tail feathers. 33% renew all their lesser coverts while 67% leave the odd single lesser covert in the bottom row unmoulted. 68% of 1Ys renew no median coverts at all; the remainder moult all (8%) or some. 29.5% moult 1-6 greater coverts, 70.5% moult none (n = 373). 29% moult 1-3 tertials and 18% one to all tail feathers (16% only R1).

Adults have a complete post-nuptial moult, but can exceptionally retain a single primary covert or alula feather.

Ageing in autumn and winter: Plumage criteria are usable with experience. The key is moult limits in the greater, median, or lesser coverts, or within the tertials; plus bleached and worn juvenile greater coverts.

About a third of 1Y birds show a moult break in the greater coverts which is relatively easy to recognise (in most cases, only GC9 is renewed, while GD10 is old). The moulted greater coverts have a broad olive-brown edge, while the unmoulted juvenile greater coverts are narrowly tipped lighter and are abraded. 1Y birds without a moult limit can be distinguished by the presence of individual unmoulted median and lesser coverts; and with greater experience, by their bleached and worn (all unmoulted) greater coverts. The tail is not helpful for ageing.

Ageing in spring: Prebreeding moult, for adults and 2Ys, comprises body feathers and some of the coverts, tertials and tail. The lesser coverts are either partially or not at all renewed. A quarter renew one to all of their median coverts and about half the birds renew 1-5 greater coverts (n = 75). Tertial moult is more common in the prebreeding moult than in postjuvenile moult, visible in 92% of birds; 57% renew all three tertials. 33% renew no tail feathers; most moult just the one; 4% renew them all.

As a result of this prebreeding moult, both age classes show moult limits in spring. Age determination is very difficult, but as a rule, 2Y primaries and secondaries are more bleached than those of adults.