

Grassveld Pipit

Gewone Koester

Anthus cinnamomeus

The Grassveld Pipit is an abundant medium-sized pipit of eastern and southern Africa. Its centre of abundance in southern Africa is on the southeastern plateau in the grassland biome. The abundance decreases with increasing aridity from the Kalahari region of central Botswana and the Karoo westwards. It is relatively sparse in Namibia and absent from the Namib and contiguous northwestern Cape Province, with the exception of the cultivated parts of the lower Orange River basin where lucerne is grown.

It ranges to the north as several different races, extending as far north in the east as Sudan, Ethiopia and Somalia, and east of the Red Sea to southwestern Arabia (Clancey 1990b). North of the equatorial forests it extends narrowly to Cameroon and Nigeria.

Afrotropical *A. cinnamomeus* is an allospecies of the *A. novaeseelandiae* superspecies, with other allospecies present in the Palearctic, the Indo-Malayan Region and Australasia. The five subspecies in the region (Clancey 1980b; Clancey *et al.* 1987) show largely continuous ranges on the present map.

The identification of pipits is fraught with difficulty and they are frequently misidentified. The Grassveld Pipit, however, is one of the most familiar and easily identified, owing to its size, white outer tail feathers and distinctive song, and the atlas data can be considered comprehensive and largely reliable. Compared with the most similar Mountain Pipit *A. hoeschi*, which breeds in the Drakensberg alpine grasslands, it has the base of the bill yellowish and not flesh-coloured, while the hind claw is long and slender. The Mountain Pipit lacks white in the tail, is more heavily streaked, dusker below, is substantially larger in size and has a different song. It is still uncertain, however, to what extent they can be separated with certainty in the field.

Habitat: It favours most grasslands, including open stretches fringing pans and in lightly wooded savanna, dry floodplains with short vegetation and recently burnt open veld, but it avoids dense rank growth. It is also found in the dry interior and in the west on the periphery of saline pans. It also frequently inhabits agricultural lands, usually fallow fields. It breeds from sea-level to *c.* 2000 m in the high interior. The vegetation associations illustrate its catholic choice of habitats.

Movements: While the population on the Mozambique coastal plain, race *A. c. spurium*, is seemingly largely sedentary, the plateau populations of the subspecies *rufuloides* and *bocagii* and even *lichenya* are said to move after breeding from late April–May, spending the nonbreeding season largely along the Mozambique coastlands and regions to the north-east of the mid-Zambezi, returning to their breeding grounds from late September to early October (Clancey 1990b). The rather limited seasonal variation in reporting rates for all Zones demonstrates that any such movements are only partial. There is plenty of field evidence for movements: substantial wintering populations are found on fallow lands in eastern Botswana (Brewster 1996); there are movements off the high-lying grassland plateaus of the Transvaal in winter (W.R. Tarboton



pers. comm.); and it is essentially a dry-season visitor to the higher-rainfall areas of Zimbabwe (A.J. Tree *in litt.*). Seasonal fluctuations in reporting rate may also be linked to a reduced conspicuousness during the post-breeding moult and increased conspicuousness during breeding when calling and displaying.

Breeding: It breeds in spring and summer, mainly between September and the end of the peak summer rains in February. Available egg-laying data confirm the subtle differences in the atlas data, with earlier peak breeding in the southwestern Cape Province (Zone 4), August–November, and in Zimbabwe (Zone 5), September–December, compared to the Transvaal (Zone 6), October–January, and Namibia and Botswana (mainly Zones 1 and 2), October–February (Winterbottom 1968a; Irwin 1981; Tarboton *et al.* 1987b;

Skinner 1995a; Brown & Clinning *in press*).

Interspecific relationships: It is marginally sympatric with the Mountain Pipit, to which it is closely allied, along the escarpment of the Drakensberg. In the nonbreeding season and on migration it occurs in flocks with Redcapped Larks *Calandrella cinerea* and other pipits, e.g. on recently burnt grasslands.

Historical distribution and conservation: The limited available evidence suggests that the Grassveld Pipit has increased in recent times in association with the spread of agriculture. It is a widespread, adaptable species which readily occupies cleared lands and therefore is not in need of special conservation attention at present. Heavy use of pesticides would tend to affect it by locally affecting the availability of insect food.

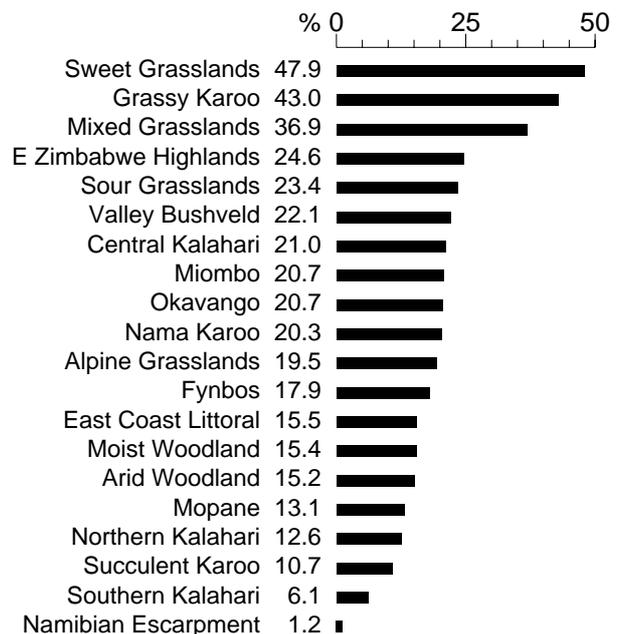
P.A. Clancey

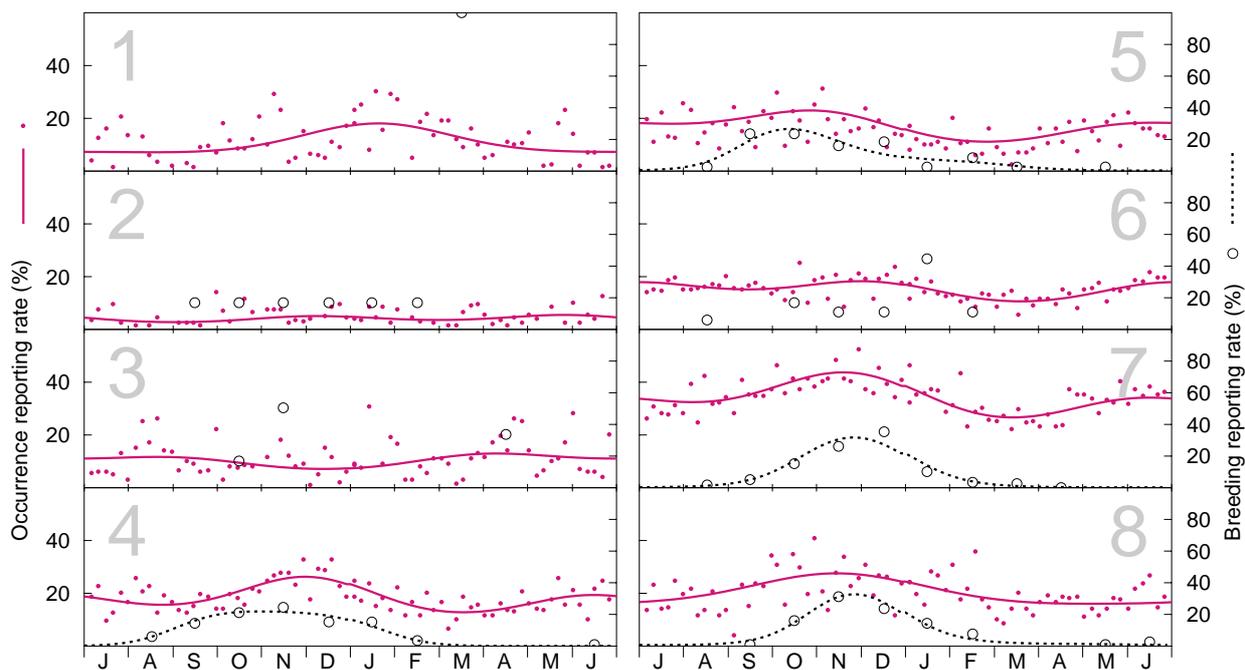
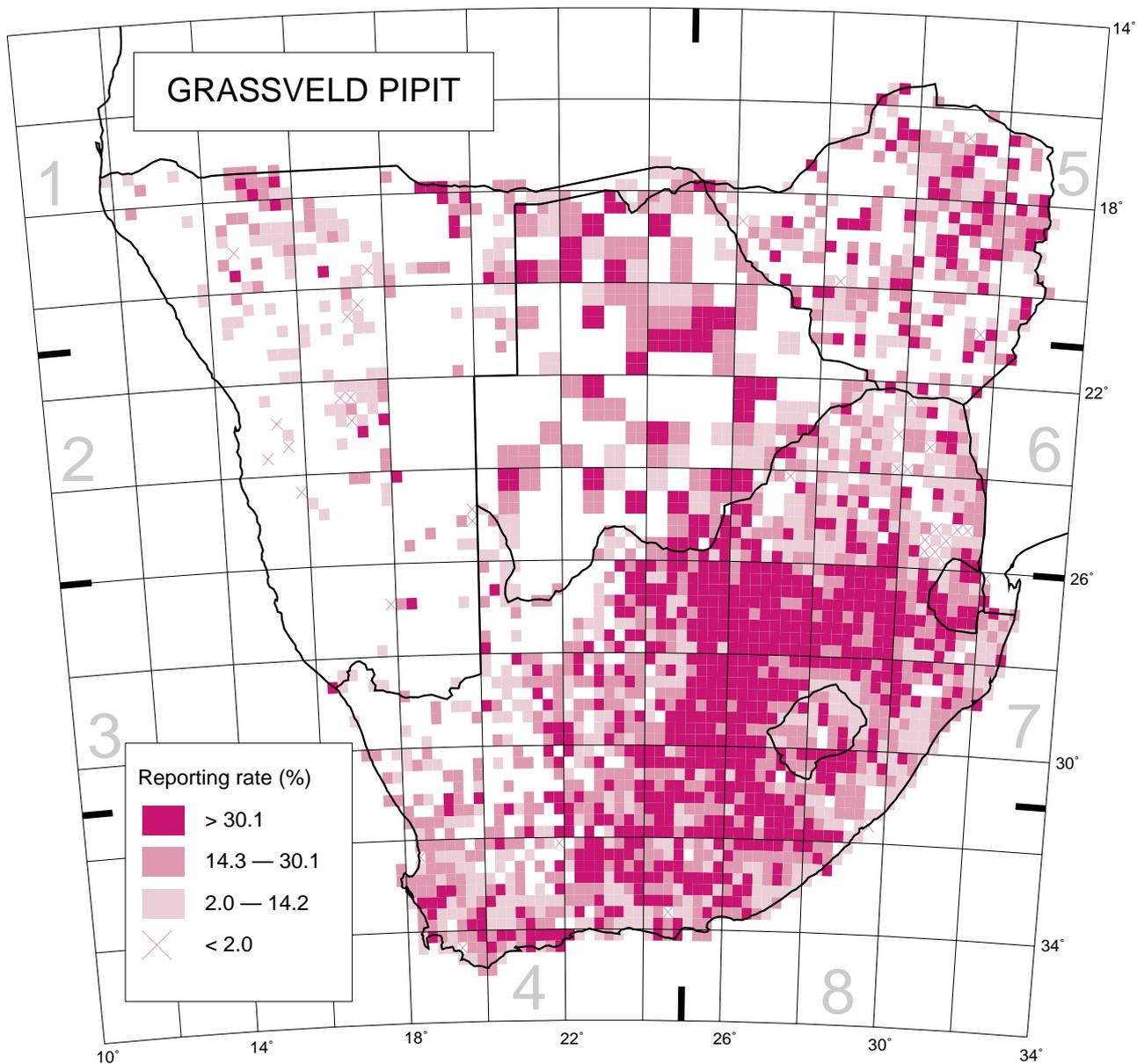
Recorded in 2467 grid cells, 54.4%

Total number of records: 30 115

Mean reporting rate for range: 22.9%

Reporting rates for vegetation types





Models of seasonality for Zones. Number of records (top to bottom, left to right):
 Occurrence: 334, 150, 595, 1592, 1515, 1732, 6733, 1130; Breeding: 2, 6, 6, 145, 38, 18, 199, 67.