

Mountain Pipit

Bergkoester

Anthus hoeschi

The Mountain Pipit is a southern African breeding endemic, with a breeding range restricted to the highest-altitude alpine grasslands of the Drakensberg massif, ranging from the northeastern Cape Province to the main Quathlamba range of Lesotho, c. 1800–3000 m. It is believed to winter north of the region in the Zambezi–Zaire watershed of eastern Angola, Shaba in Zaire and adjacent northern Zambia (Clancey 1990b).

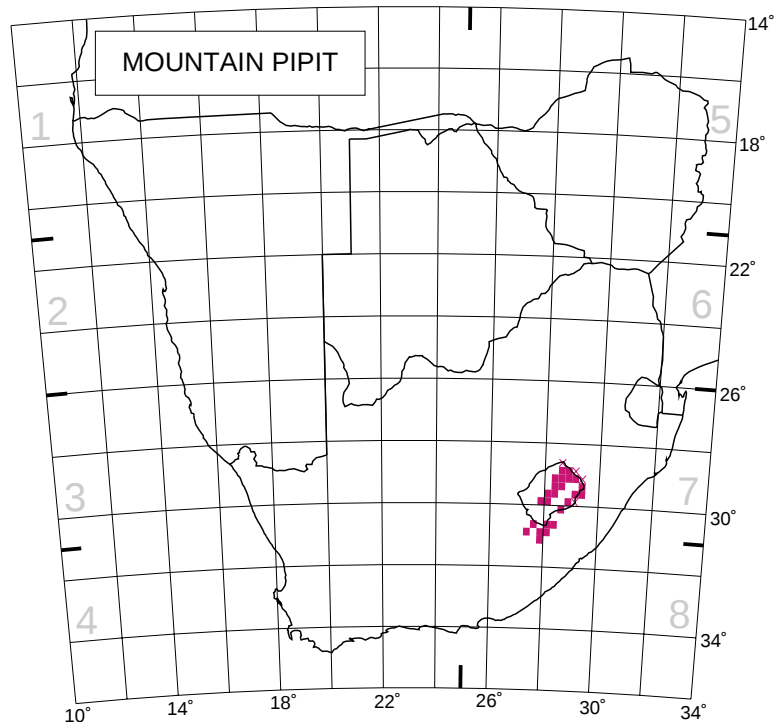
The species was initially collected in the Erongo Mountains of Namibia, later described again from nonbreeding birds collected at Balovale in northwestern Zambia, and subsequently described for a third time from material taken in the eastern highlands of Lesotho during the breeding season. The issues arising from the multiple naming of this cryptic species were considered by Clancey (1978, 1984c, 1990b) and Mendelsohn (1984).

Phylogenetically it may be most closely linked to Jackson's Pipit *A. latistriatus*, another enigmatic form of high-altitude grasslands occurring above the treeline of western African mountains, east to the Rift Valley. The Mountain Pipit closely resembles the Grassveld Pipit *A. cinnamomeus*, but is larger, more heavily streaked with blackish brown over the crown, duskier and more vinaceous on the underside, and lacks any white in the tail. The base of the bill is flesh-coloured and not yellowish. It is, however, not at all clear how well the species can be recognized in the field, most particularly away from its breeding grounds, where it remained virtually unrecorded during the atlas period. It is possible, though not confirmed, that some of the many rejected atlas records of Longbilled Pipit *A. similis*, out of its normal habitat on Kalahari sands in Botswana (e.g. Penry 1994), may in fact pertain to migrant Mountain Pipits.

It moults shortly after breeding, then migrates north-westwards, March–April. Based on scant specimen evidence, northbound migration takes migrants further to the west, including northern Namibia, than the spring return, during which it has been collected near Francistown (2127AB) in northeastern Botswana (Clancey 1986a). It arrives on its breeding grounds from late October onwards, and the eggs are laid November–January (Mendelsohn 1984). The few atlas breeding records agree with this. It breeds at higher altitudes than its congener, the Grassveld Pipit, the two species being narrowly altitudinally sympatric.

The Mountain Pipit is not endangered in South Africa (Brooke 1984b), though the population is relatively small.

P.A. Clancey



Recorded in 28 grid cells, 0.6%
Total number of records: 61
Mean reporting rate for range: 5.6%

Reporting rates for vegetation types

