

## Longbilled Pipit

### Nicholsonse Koester

*Anthus similis*

In the Afrotropics the Longbilled Pipit has a highly fragmented range extending beyond the continental limits to the Arabian Peninsula, the Middle East and Iran, east to India and Burma. On the African continent, the isolated northern and northeastern populations are separated from the southern ones by unsuitable terrain. The southern populations range from western Angola, northern Namibia and the northeastern Transvaal south to the southwestern Cape Province. It is somewhat solitary, occurring either singly or in pairs or trios, even where common. It is the most highly polytypic of the Afrotropical pipits with some 14 subspecies being recognized, of which five occur in the region (Clancey 1990b).

The field identification of the larger pipits is difficult and all species are frequently confused, most particularly within the group of species with striped upperparts (Longbilled, Wood *A. nyassae*, Grassveld *A. cinnamomeus* and Mountain *A. hoeschi* Pipits) on the one hand, and species with plain upperparts (Plainbacked *A. leucophrys* and Buffy *A. vaalensis* Pipits) on the other hand.

The atlas data contained several apparent anomalies when compared to specimen evidence and habitat availability, reflecting some confusion. In the present map, all putative Kalahari records have been deleted, and all records from the northern, broadleaved woodlands have been attributed to the Wood Pipit. (For most of the atlas period the two species were treated as conspecific.) The remaining records fall within the known range of the Longbilled Pipit and overlap with its typical habitat of rocky slopes, but not all records could be confirmed.

**Habitat:** It generally frequents slopes in relatively arid and eroded, broken veld, often steppe-like with erosion scars, stones and outcrop rock interspersed with grass clumps and low scrub. It is often among low trees and light woodland on stony ground, but will visit adjacent well-grazed areas and bare or burnt ground liberally scattered with the droppings of stock. It is sparse at the coast with populations most numerous *c.* 500–2500 m, penetrating some way into desert in the western parts of the range, e.g. the lower Orange River and along the inland edge of the Namib.

**Movements:** It is more sedentary than other sympatric pipits of comparable size, and not subject to the well-defined seasonal altitudinal shifts seen in some other species. This is reflected in the models.

**Breeding:** Atlas breeding records indicate a spring/summer season with a September–December peak, which agrees with published information (Dean 1971; Irwin 1981; Tarboton *et al.* 1987b; Maclean 1993b).

**Interspecific relationships:** The Wood Pipit is this species' counterpart in the *Brachystegia* woodland of much of southcentral Africa. It is believed to be allopatric with the Wood Pipit (Clancey 1988b), but further research is needed, particularly in the eastern highlands in Zimbabwe where the Wood Pipit occurs in rocky grassland habitat (Irwin 1981) normally typical of Longbilled Pipit. This pipit frequently consorts with

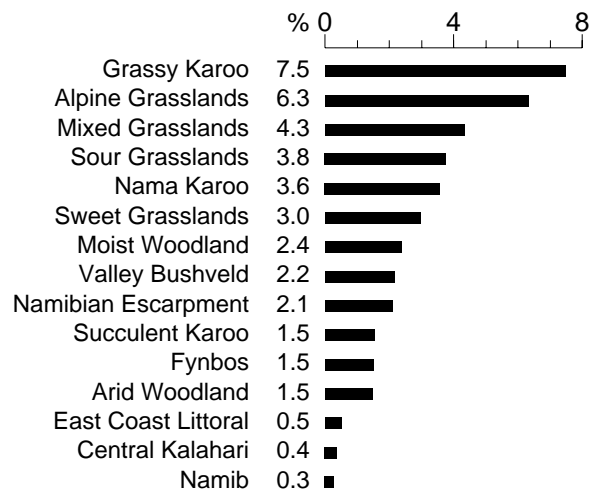
other pipits, longclaws and rockthrushes on recently burnt ground to feed on incapacitated insects.

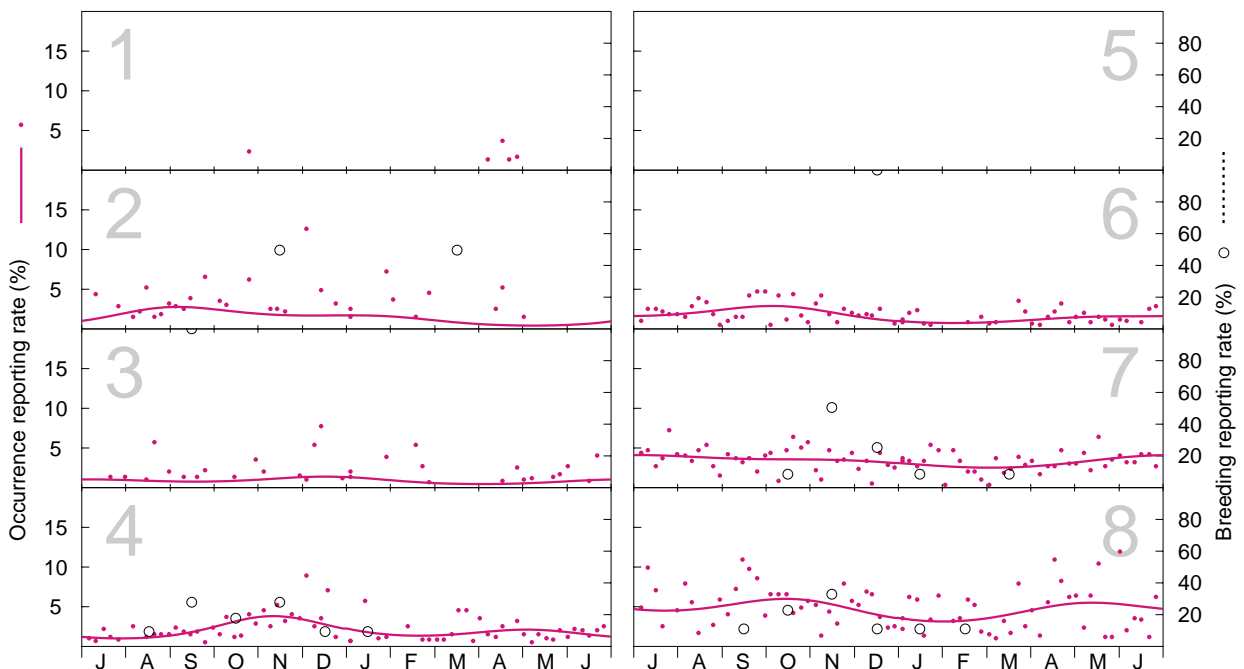
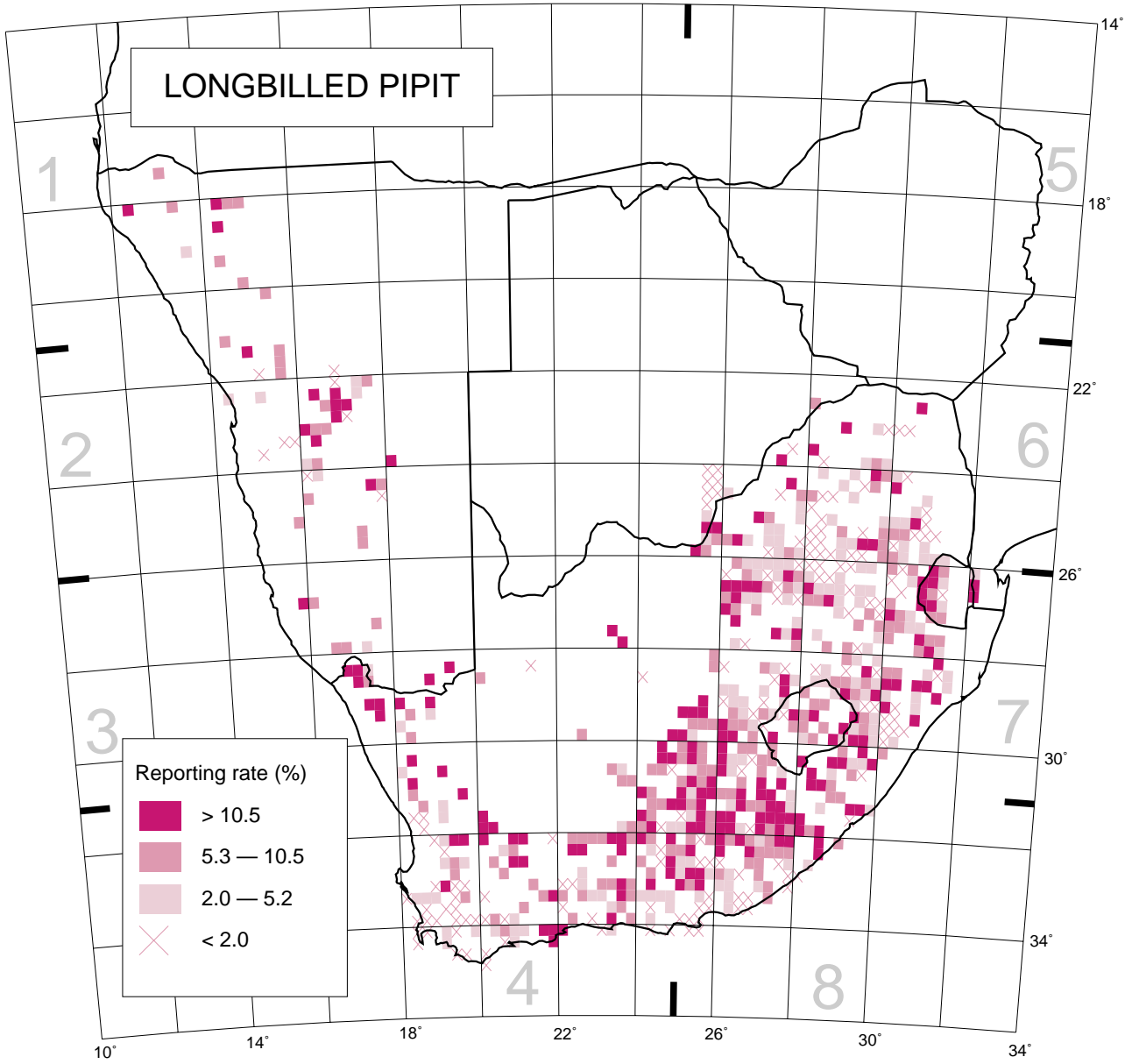
**Historical distribution and conservation:** As it largely inhabits land unsuitable for agriculture, it has probably suffered little from habitat loss and degradation. Even beyond the present limits, it shows a tendency to spread into dry and desertic country. Without being numerous anywhere, the Longbilled Pipit is widespread and is not under threat.

P.A. Clancey

Recorded in 733 grid cells, 16.2%  
Total number of records: 3243  
Mean reporting rate for range: 4.7%

#### Reporting rates for vegetation types





Models of seasonality for Zones. Number of records (top to bottom, left to right):  
 Occurrence: 9, 49, 47, 174, 0, 186, 656, 260; Breeding: 0, 2, 1, 11, 0, 1, 12, 9.