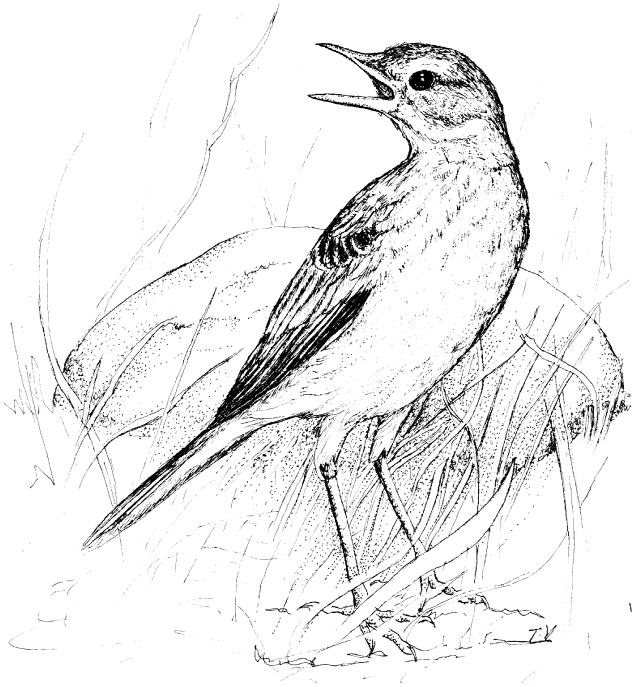


Buffy Pipit

Vaalkoester

Anthus vaalensis

The distribution of the Buffy Pipit lies to the south and east of the equatorial rainforest belt, extending in the northeast to Kenya, southern Ethiopia and western Somalia. In southern Africa it ranges from Namibia, Botswana and Zimbabwe, south through the eastern half of South Africa. It is absent from Mozambique (Clancey 1990b), most of the coastal regions of KwaZulu-Natal and Transkei, and from the most arid regions of South Africa and Namibia. Its distribution in South Africa seems sandwiched between arid and mesic areas.

Field identification of the larger pipits is extremely difficult and all species are frequently confused, especially the sibling species with plain upperparts: the Plainbacked *A. leucophrys* and Buffy Pipits. The latter is lighter and buffier above and warm reddish buff over the rump; its pale supercilium is less sharply defined; the ventral streaking is still further reduced; the base of the under mandible is yellow; and the hind claw is shorter. Four or perhaps five races breed in southern Africa (Clancey 1990b).

It flocks to a limited extent during the winter months, but is generally encountered singly or in pairs. It is best classified as frequent rather than common, but has been found to be numerous in the southwestern parts of the Free State and parts of Zimbabwe where numbers have increased in recent times in association with stock-farming (Clancey 1990b).

Habitat: It favours open grassy plains, especially with bare ground, well grazed by game or livestock, and where the veld is dotted with anthills and low scrub. It also frequents fallow pastures, recently burnt fields and the periphery of saltpans. The vegetation analysis indicates its occurrence throughout the woodland and grassland biomes. The relatively high reporting rates from the Okavango, however, almost certainly reflect confusion with the Plainbacked Pipit which is much more common there (Brewster 1991).

Movements: Birds with features of the subspecies *A. v. daviesi* breeding in the drier parts of the Cape Province are occasionally present after breeding as far east as southwestern KwaZulu-Natal, and some of the visitors to that sector are also of the nominate subspecies, probably from the Transvaal. The race *chobiensis* is a seasonal breeding visitor to both Zambia and Zimbabwe (where breeding is before the main rains) moving to nonbreeding grounds, possibly to the southwest, during the wet season (Clancey 1990b). The extent of its post-breeding range is still largely unclear, but is related to an avoidance of thickening grass cover after rain (Clancey 1990b). One or perhaps two forms breed in Angola (*neumanni* and, perhaps, *namibicus*) and similarly are wet-season migrants to Namibia, Botswana and the northern Cape Province (Clancey 1990b; Brewster 1991). Atlas records indicate clearly lower reporting rates during the latter part of the wet season in Zimbabwe (Zone 5), and a concomitant increase in the drier western areas (Zone 1–3), supporting the idea of movement between mesic and xeric parts of the region.

Breeding: The few atlas data are in spring and early summer. Egglaying data for Zimbabwe span July–February, peaking September–November (Irwin 1981). Breeding in South Africa spans August–December, peaking September–December (Maclean 1993b).

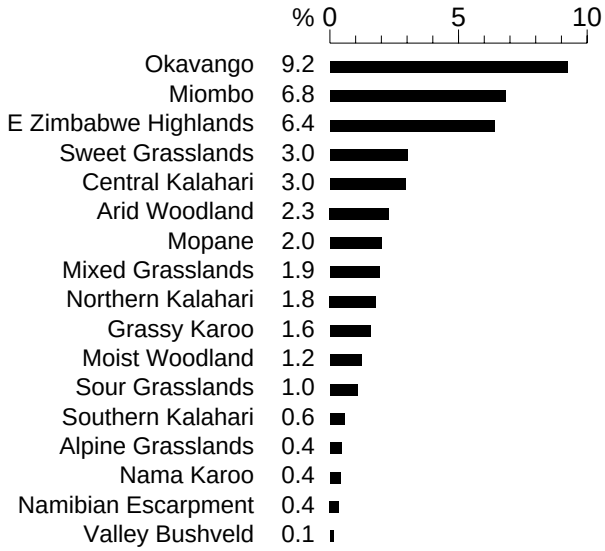
Interspecific relationships: Despite the problems of field identification, it can be said with confidence that the species is in many places sympatric with the Plainbacked Pipit, even during breeding. It may be found alongside the Grassveld Pipit *A. cinnamomeus*, both when breeding and when attracted to recently burnt fields.

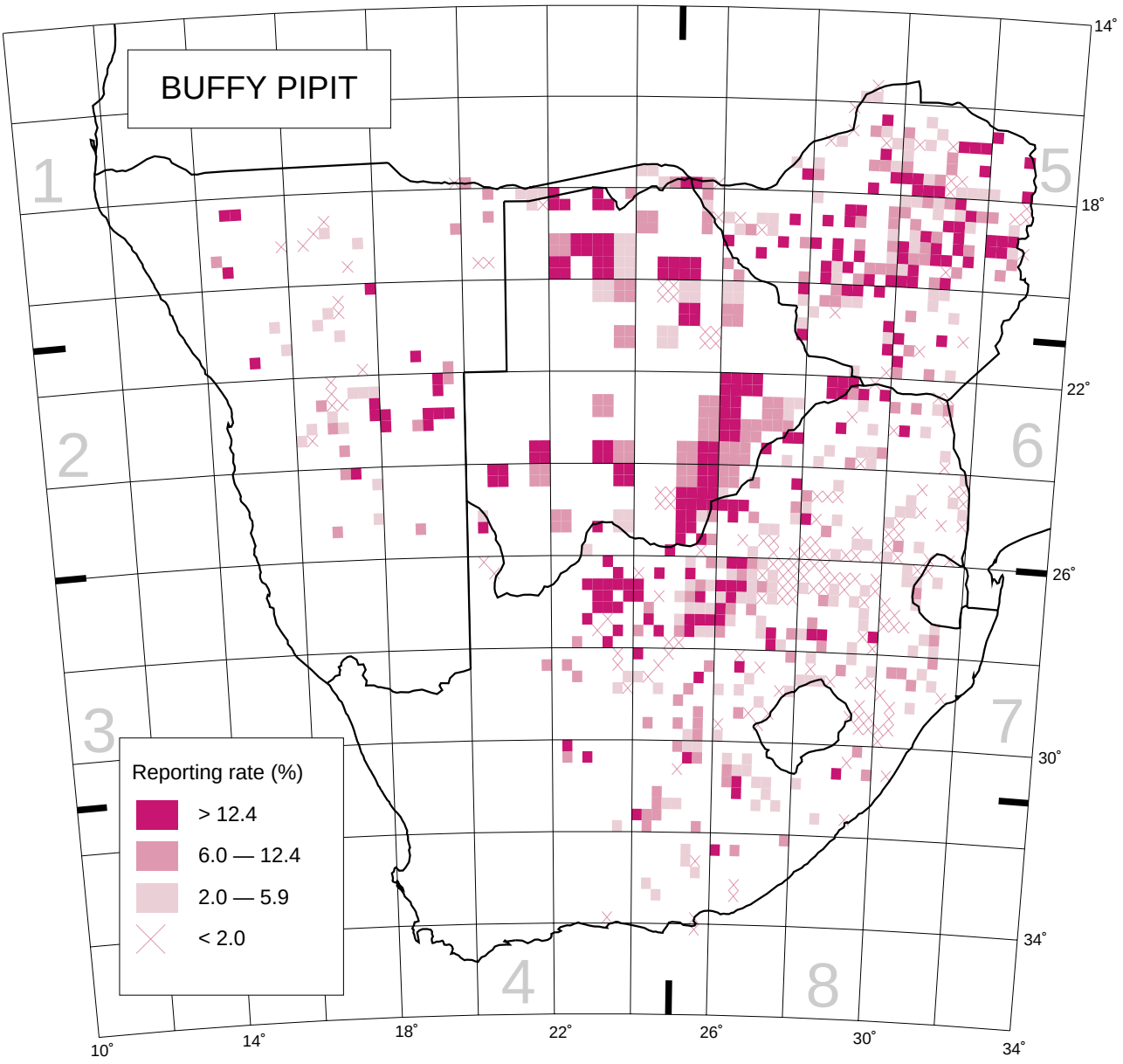
Historical distribution and conservation: The Buffy Pipit has increased in recent times in association with stock farming (Clancey 1990b). It is not under threat.

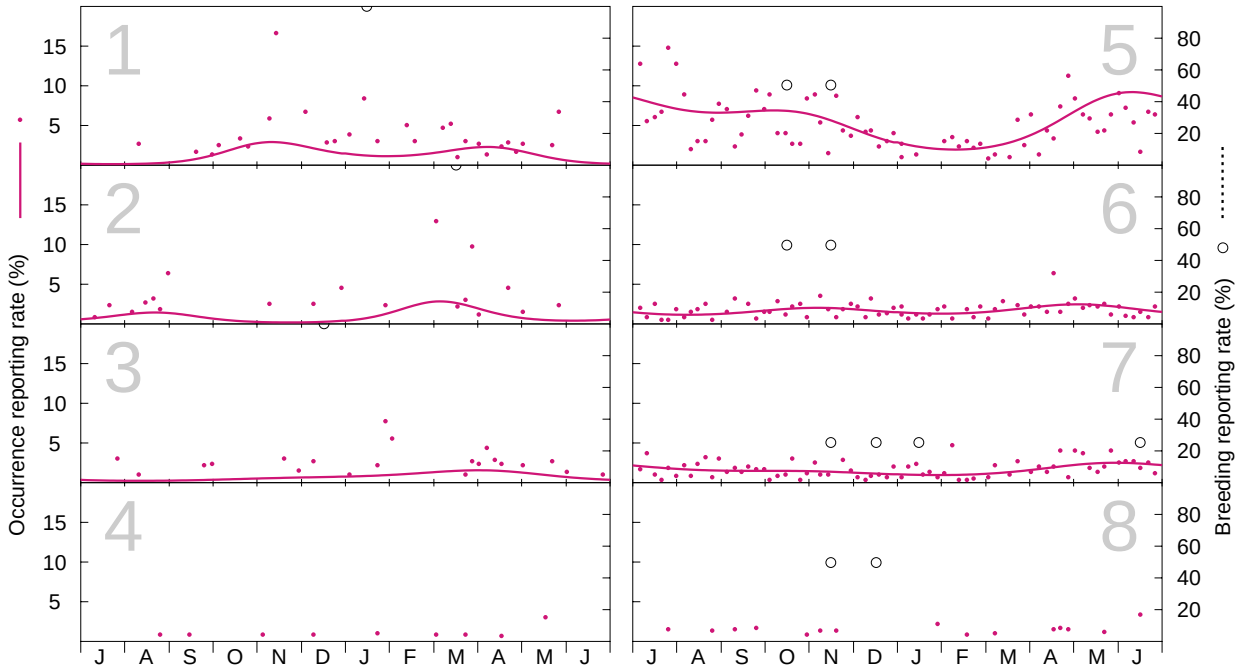
P.A. Clancey

Recorded in 848 grid cells, 18.7%
Total number of records: 2069
Mean reporting rate for range: 4.0%

Reporting rates for vegetation types







Models of seasonality for Zones. Number of records (top to bottom, left to right):
Occurrence: 43, 40, 42, 11, 493, 195, 310, 16; Breeding: 1, 1, 1, 0, 2, 2, 4, 2.