

### Shorttailed Pipit

Kortsterkkoester

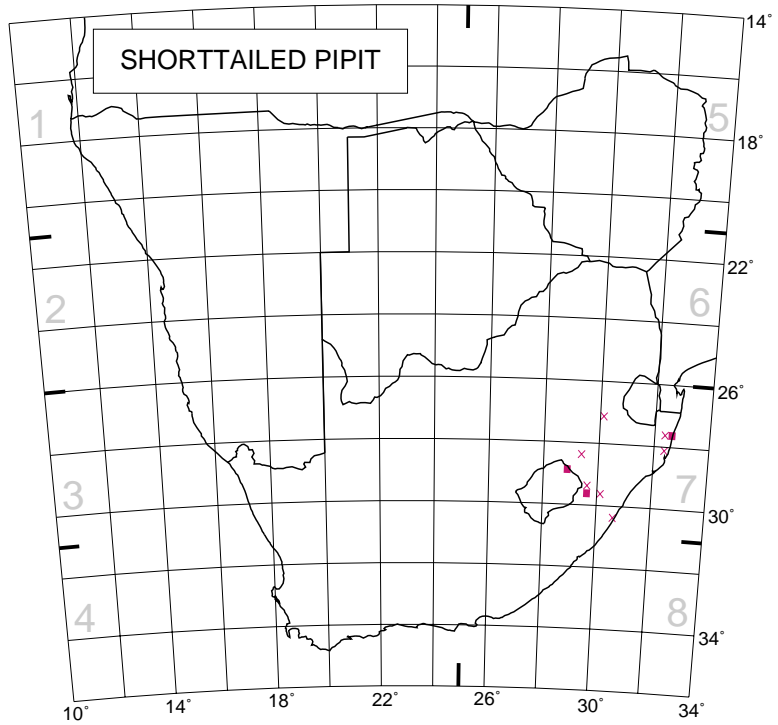
*Anthus brachyurus*

This diminutive pipit is little known and poorly recorded in southern Africa, where it is found in the Transvaal (cf. Tarboton *et al.* 1987b) and KwaZulu-Natal. There is a single record from Zimbabwe at Beit Bridge (2230AA) in November (Donnelly 1982a). In southern Mozambique it has been found on the Limpopo floodplain and at Savane, to the north of Beira. In the latter area it was particularly common and was seasonally present on temporarily inundated grassland (Clancey 1969b, 1985c). The breeding grounds of these birds are unknown, but are probably to the north of the mid-Zambezi rather than in South Africa. In Zambia it is 'on the whole very uncommon' (Benson *et al.* 1971); it occurs more widely in equatorial Africa. It is in the main restricted to the south and east of the equatorial forest, reaching Gabon, the Congo Republic and northern Angola in the west (see Clancey 1985a, 1990b). Three, perhaps four, subspecies are recognized, the nominate race occurring in southern Africa (Clancey 1990b).

It is not overtly gregarious at any stage, nor does it consort with other pipits. It is inconspicuous and elusive. When flushed, which it does reluctantly, it soon lands in grass and moves rapidly away under cover. It can readily be mistaken in the field for the female of a small widowbird *Euplectes* sp. (J.M. Mendelsohn pers. comm.).

The evidence currently available for South Africa suggests that it is a highly local breeding visitor on moist, seasonally inundated, short grassland on the plateau up to c. 1850 m, e.g. at Giant's Castle Game Reserve (2929BC), spending the nonbreeding season mainly along the littoral, especially on floodplains, e.g. around Lake St Lucia (2832AD).

Breeding records are available from the interior of KwaZulu-Natal and from the plateau of the Transvaal. These span October–January (Dean 1971; Maclean 1985c; Tarboton *et al.* 1987b).



Recorded in 10 grid cells, 0.2%  
 Total number of records: 20  
 Mean reporting rate for range: 1.1%

It may have decreased in range in South Africa, especially in the western Transvaal, but its elusive nature makes this difficult to confirm (Brooke 1984b; Tarboton *et al.* 1987b). It is considered 'rare' in South Africa (Brooke 1984b) and its habitat is under pressure from commercial afforestation, sugar-cane farming, overgrazing and dense rural human populations.

P.A. Clancey

