

Motacillidae: Change species name of Mountain Pipit *Anthus hoeschi* to *A. editus*

Mountain Pipit (*Anthus hoeschi*) is a breeding endemic to the Drakensberg mountains of Lesotho and South Africa. Its movements in the non-breeding season have long been debated. In the past, some authors considered it a long distant migrant going to NW Zambia and adjacent parts of Angola and DRC (Clancey, 1984, Johnson and Maclean, 1994, Dean, 2000). However, most authors now agree that current evidence doesn't support this and that it is likely instead an altitudinal migrant within South Africa (Craig, 2015, Hustler, 1993, Dowsett et al., 2008, Irwin, 2010, Dowsett and Dowsett-Lemaire, 1993, Davies and Peacock, 2014).

The type specimen of *A. hoeschi* is not from the breeding range in the Drakensberg but instead from northern Namibia (Stresemann, 1938). Subsequently, the taxon *lwenarum* was described from birds in NW Zambia (White, 1946), initially as a subspecies of African Pipit (then *A. richardi* now *A. cinnamomeus*) and later considered conspecific with *A. hoeschi* (Clancey, 1984). However, the conspecific status of *lwenarum* and *hoeschi* has been challenged. Dowsett et al. (2008) list *lwenarum* under African Pipit and state that "(*A. r. lwenarum*) has been considered conspecific with the Mountain Pipit *A. hoeschi* of South Africa...but this remains unproven". *lwenarum* is not recognized at all as a taxon under the current AvIList version. Mountain Pipit is no longer on the official Zambian list and there have been no records to suggest that the species occurs in that country or in adjacent parts of Angola or DRC. In fact, it was only in 1951 that Mountain Pipits from their breeding range in the Lesotho Highlands were collected and described as taxon *editus* (Vincent, 1951). For a detailed account of the taxonomic history of Mountain Pipit see Craig (2015). An abbreviated taxonomic history of Mountain Pipit is also nicely summarized by Etienne Marais in this popular article: <https://faansiepeacock.com/mountain-pipits-a-piece-of-the-puzzle/>

Craig (2015) re-examined the original specimens behind the descriptions of *hoeschi*, *editus* and *lwenarum*. Based on plumage and morphological analysis he concluded that "the two specimens of *hoeschi* from Namibia are not from the same population as the birds named *editus* from the Drakensberg, based on both plumage and mensural data. They also differ in some respects from the Zambian pipits described as *lwenarum*." Specifically, Symes et al. (2015) found that when a PCA of mensural characters (wing, tail, bill dimensions, tarsus, hind claw) of female pipits was conducted the two *hoeschi* were outliers that didn't fall within the *editus* cluster (see Figure 4 in that reference). On plumage, most birds in the *editus* group had buffy rather than white outer tail feathers whereas the *hoeschi* specimens had what the author considered to be "dull white margins". Additionally, the ovaries of the second specimen of *hoeschi* (collected in Namibia) were enlarged potentially suggesting local breeding rather than being a non-breeding visitor.

Given these differences in plumage, morphology and the absent of any convincing records of Mountain Pipits from northern Namibia, Craig (2015) proposes that the birds breeding in the Drakensberg mountains should instead be called *Anthus editus* Vincent 1951 as the specimens from which the other taxa derive (*hoeschi* and *lwenarum*) appear not to be from the same species. This recommendation was followed by Pietersen et al. (2018) in his phylogeny of *Anthus*. Based on this, the type of Mountain Pipit as currently understood, a breeding endemic to the Drakensberg mountains with altitudinal migrations within South Africa, should be from the collection made by Vincent (1951) and assigned the name *editus*.

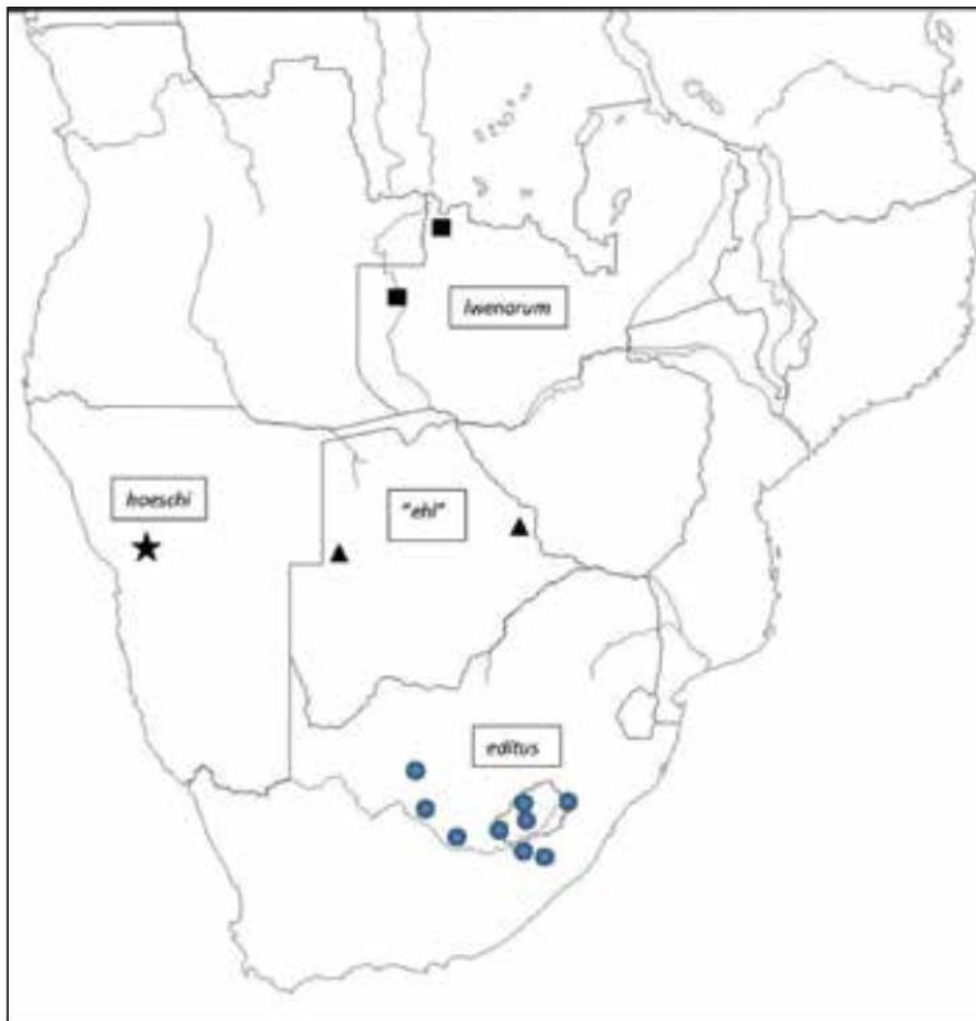


Fig. 1. Collecting localities for Mountain Pipit (*Anthus editus*, *A. hoeschi*, *A. lwenarum*, 'ehl') specimens examined in this study.

Figure 1 from Craig (2015) showing the locations for Mountain Pipit specimens examined in the current study.

Outstanding questions

- The paper still leaves the unanswered question of what species do the *hoeschi* individuals from Namibia represent if they are not Mountain Pipits? Possibly just a variant of African Pipit?
- Additionally, the six male birds representing *lwenarum* from Zambia were not separable from *editus* based on measurements. However, given the lack of any substantiated records from Zambia or adjacent countries the author suggests that there is no grounds for lumping *lwenarum* with *editus*.
- The morphological and plumage differences highlighted by Craig (2015) between these taxa are minor and to some degree overlapping. However, given that there is essentially no convincing evidence that Mountain Pipits go outside South Africa and that that species has

distinct behaviour, appearance and vocalizations in life (Dowsett-Lemaire, 1989) it seems extremely unlikely that these *hoeschi* northern Namibian or *lwenarum* Zambian birds are Mountain Pipits.

- Where do Mountain Pipits go in the non-breeding season - seems that it would be ideal for a geolocator study.

NB. The proposal was supported unanimously by all 7 members of the Africa RAG who commented on it.

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