

## The eastern and northeastern African subspecies of *Anthus similis* Jerdon

by P. A. Clancey

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Resulting from the recent contribution by Clancey (1985) culminating in the recognition of the miombo-based Woodland Pipit *Anthus nyassae* Neumann (with subspecies *nyassae*, *schoutedeni* and *frondicolus*) as a species discrete from the wide-ranging steppe and montane orientated Longbilled Pipit *A. similis*, with which it was previously linked subspecifically in the Afrotropics, the last named pipit is now seen as comprising 2 spatially remote assemblages, their ranges sundered by populations of *nyassae*, and, in the east, by large tracts of country untenanted by either species. In the Afrotropics 13 races of *similis* occur.

Variation in the southern populations of *similis* is now well-established, following Clancey (1956, 1964, 1985), but recent study of the eastern and northeastern populations on material in museums in Europe and Africa shows that the races of this region as outlined by White in *Peters'* (1960), Hall (1961) and the more recent checklist of the birds of much of the area (Britton *et al.* (1980)) are in urgent need of revision. The arrangement of the populations currently adopted appears to have been arrived at piecemeal rather than as the result of an overall survey.

In the region concerned, variation in the Longbilled Pipit affects general size, the colour and levels of saturation over the dorsum and the intensity of its shaft-streaking, and on the underside the degree and extent of buffiness in fresh condition and of the breast streaking. Large-sized birds, those with wings in ♂♂ 96–105, ♀♀ 90–96 mm, extend from southeastern and eastern Zaïre, Rwanda and Burundi and northern and northeastern Tanzania to the interior of Kenya, Ethiopia (including Eritrea) and the southeastern Sudan. Birds of comparable dimensions are present in southwestern Saudi Arabia in Asir Tihama, south to North Yemen, being replaced by rather smaller representatives in South Yemen, (including the Hadramaut) and south of the Gulf of Aden by a like population in Somalia, these last with wings in ♂♂ 93–99.5, ♀♀ 85–91.5 mm. In association with increased aridity, the Darfur, Sudan, population is also demonstrably small with wings in ♂♂ 94–99, ♀♀ 87–92 mm.

Much of the criticism to be found with the current arrangement of the eastern and northeastern African populations into subspecies centres on other workers' assessments of the variation occurring in the birds of the Ethiopian highlands. Specimens of this relatively high rainfall population are saturated above, the blackish brown dorsal shaft-streaking broad, the individual feathers fringed dull olivaceous tawny. Below, the surface is deep, warm buff, darkest over the breast and sides, the former streaked with dark brown. Populations comparable to those of the highlands of Ethiopia, but showing constant minor differences of their own, are present in southwestern Saudi Arabia and North Yemen, and through Kenya to the north of Tanzania, Uganda and the eastern limits of Zaïre. The small-sized South Yemen and Somali birds alluded to earlier are paler and more greyish vinaceous and less streaked dorsally than the foregoing. Ventrally, they are more vinaceous and less buffy, with the forethroat and belly whiter. Two other populations differ sharply from those



forming the eastern Zaïre/Uganda and northern Tanzania – Eritrea/south-western Arabian axis, the first being the isolated Darfur, western Sudan, population. This isolate is lightly streaked and deep tawny-buff over the upper-parts, and below is a bright clear buff with obsolete pectoral streaking. As in the case of the South Yemen and Somali populations, the size is small, as already shown.

In the Ankole/Kigezi region of southwestern Uganda a shift to a plainer and more greyish and less strongly striated dorsal surface and whiter, less buffy, ventral parts is to be found, such birds extending southwards through Rwanda and Burundi to southeastern Zaïre. White (1957), noting a segment of this variation, described the race *A.s. hallae* on a small sample of largely moulting juveniles from southwestern Uganda without giving consideration to the contiguous *A.s. dewittei*, named years earlier by Chapin. This was a major oversight, as I now find that *hallae* is the same as *dewittei*, and accordingly merge the 2 taxa in the arrangement of the populations proposed below. It is unfortunate that *hallae* has been widely taken into the literature, including the continuation of *Peters' Check-List*, but its discreteness from *dewittei* has only very recently been queried (Clancey 1985).

While levels of plumage saturation are, in the main, correlated with variation in precipitation, a like correlation between environment and general size is less clear cut. As shown, size is seen to decline in the south of the Arabian Peninsula and Somalia, and on Socotra, in association with conditions of increasing aridity, as they do in Darfur, in Sudan. In contrast with these trends, one finds that in the case of the Aïr (Asben), Niger, population, size is again every bit as large as in the case of the mesic populations of northeastern Africa.

The Longbilled Pipit populations of eastern and northeastern Africa can now be arranged in the following subspecies:

(a) ***Anthus similis hararensis* Neumann**

*Anthus nicholsoni hararensis* Neumann, *Journ. f. Ornith.*, liv (1906), p. 233: Abu Bekr, near Harar, southeastern Ethiopia.

Synonyms: *Anthus nicholsoni longirostris* Neumann, 1905; Gardulla, L. Abaya, Ethiopia.

*Anthus similis neumannianus* Hartert & Collin, 1927.

New name for *A.n. longirostris* Neumann pre-occupied.

Upper-parts heavily streaked with blackish brown, the feathers edged Buckthorn Brown (Ridgway 1912). Breast and sides deep Warm Buff, streaked on breast with dark brown; forethroat and belly centre Light Buff.

Wings (mm) of 11 ♂♂, 95–103 (99.0), SD 2.74; of 6 ♀♀, 92.5–96 (94.1), SD 1.21.

*Range.* Ethiopian highlands except for extreme northeast in Eritrea and Tigré. In the south to the Kenyan border at Mega and Yavello, and east to Harar.

(b) ***Anthus similis arabicus* Hartert**

*Anthus sordidus arabicus* Hartert, *Novit. Zool.* xxiv (1917), p. 457: Menakha, North Yemen.

Less saturated above than *hararensis* and with the shaft-streaking browner, less blackish, the fringing less strongly ochraceous. Similar in size.



Wings (mm) of 6 African  $\sigma\sigma$ , 96–105 (99.5), SD 3.85; of 1  $\phi$ , 93. Wings of 7 Arabian and Yemeni  $\sigma\sigma$ , 93.5–99 (96.9), SD 1.69; of 6  $\phi\phi$ , 88–93 (90.2), SD 2.04.

*Range.* Red Sea hills of southeastern Sudan (at Erkowit), south to Eritrea and Tigré, Ethiopia, and the southwestern Arabian Peninsula from Asir Tihama, Saudi Arabia, south to North Yemen, south of which it intergrades with *A.s. nivescens*.

(c) ***Anthus similis chyuluensis*** van Someren

*Anthus similis chyuluensis* van Someren, *Journ. E. Afr. and Ug. Nat. Hist. Soc.* xiv (1939), p. 57: Chyulu Hills, southeastern Kenya.

Similar to *A.s. bararensis* on the dorsal surface, differing below in having the entire forethroat and belly surfaces much lighter (Pale Pinkish Buff, *versus* Light Buff). Alike in size.

Wings (mm) of 17  $\sigma\sigma$ , 98–104.5 (100.3), SD 1.97; of 10  $\phi\phi$ , 90–96.5 (93.1), SD 2.48.

*Range.* The interior of Kenya from Lodwar, Lake Turkana and Marsabit southwards, reaching the Chyulu and Taita Hills in the southeast. Extends to northeastern and northern Tanzania between the Serengeti National Park and Paré Mtns, and locally through Uganda to the north of Lake Victoria. In the north reaches the Kidepo Valley, and in the west the highlands west of Lakes George and Edward (Kimboko in Zaïre). Intergrades narrowly with *A.s. dewittei* to the southwest of its range.

*Remarks.* Britton *et al.* (1980) list the species from Lamu on the northern coast of Kenya. The form occurring there is unknown but may be *A.s. nivescens*, which was described from further along the coast at Chisimoio (Kismayu) in Somalia. With the restriction of the use of the name *A.s. bararensis* to the birds breeding in the moist highlands of Ethiopia and the sinking of *A.s. hallae* into the synonymy of *A.s. dewittei*, the only available name in the literature for the Kenya/Uganda and northern Tanzanian highlands elements is van Someren's *A.s. chyuluensis*.

(d) ***Anthus similis nivescens*** Reichenow

*Anthus nivescens* Reichenow, *Ornith. Monatsber.* xiii (1905), p. 179: Chisimoio (Kismayu), southern Somalia.

Differs from the continuous *A.s. bararensis* in being less heavily streaked on the upper-parts, the feather edges paler and greyer. Lighter, somewhat vinaceous tinged, below, not strongly suffused with buff, the forethroat and belly whiter. Size ranging smaller, most marked in the female.

Wings (mm) of 11  $\sigma\sigma$ , 93–99.5 (95.3), SD 1.95; of 11  $\phi\phi$ , 85–91.5 (88.5), SD 1.94 (Somali specimens).

*Range.* Somalia, with the bulk of records from the heights of the northern escarpment country (east as far as Medishe), south locally in the west to southwestern Somalia. Perhaps locally to adjacent Kenya, as the species is listed for Lamu. The present race also occurs in the south of North Yemen (at Taizz) and in South Yemen in the Amiri highlands east to the western Hadramaut.

*Remarks.* The type-locality of this form is a most unlikely one for a species associated with steppe-like conditions and broken terrain. The type was taken by Carlo von Erlanger on 10 July 1901 (Reichenow 1905).



(e) *Anthus similis jebelmarrae* Lynes

*Anthus sordidus jebelmarrae* Lynes, *Bull. Brit. Orn. Cl.* xli (1920), p. 16: Jebel Marra, Darfur, western Sudan.

Plainer and less strongly streaked dorsally and more tawny-buff over entire upper-parts and wings and tail than races occurring to the east (*arabicus* and *hararensis*). Below, bright clear buff, the pectoral streaking obsolete, though where present restricted to the sides. Size smaller.

Wings (mm) of 12 ♂♂, 94–99 (96.5), SD 1.89; of 10 ♀♀, 87–92 (89.5), SD 1.95.

*Range.* Confined to the highlands of Darfur in the western Sudan.

(f) *Anthus similis dewittei* Chapin

*Anthus similis dewittei* Chapin, *Rev. Zool. Bot. Afr.* xxiv (1937), p. 344: Kasiki, Marungu, southeastern Shaba, Zaïre, at 2200 m a.s.l.

*Synonym:* *Anthus similis ballae* White, 1957: L. Karange, Ankole, southwestern Uganda.

Plainer, less boldly streaked, and more greyish olive, less reddish or ochraceous, over the upper-parts than *A.s. chyuluensis*. Below dull whitish with the lower fore-throat and breast heavily streaked with greyish brown. Similar in size.

Wings (mm) of 4 ♂♂, 95–100 (96.7), SD 2.21; of 8 ♀♀, 91–96 (92.6), SD 1.62.

*Range.* The Marungu Highlands of southeastern Shaba, Zaïre, extending to the northern end of L. Tanganyika, thence east of the Rift to Rwanda and Burundi and the Ankole/Kigezi region of southwestern Uganda.

*Remarks.* The type and 2 paratypes from Kasiki, in Marungu, in the Musée Royal de l'Afrique Centrale, Tervuren, were examined. The wing of the ♂ type measured 100 mm. Other specimens of this taxon at Tervuren were from Nyanza on L. Tanganika, Luntikulu at 1250 m and Lyapenda at 1800 m a.s.l., while a single ♀ from Bururi, Urundi, was also seen. At the British Museum (Nat. Hist.), Tring, the type and paratypes of *A.s. ballae* were studied. The type is a juvenile in moult to first-year dress, the wing 95 mm. Two other paratypes are also young, moulting birds, while a further specimen is an intergrade *dewittei*  $\times$  *chyuluensis*. None of this was revealed in the original description of *ballae* (White 1957).

## Other subspecies

Other subspecies of *A. similis* distributed peripherally, but widely detached from the 6 races admitted above, may be commented on in brief here.

*A.s. asbenaicus* Rothschild, 1920: Mt Baguézane, Aïr, Niger, is large sized as in the races (a), (b), (c) and (f) above, but is paler and less reddish than its nearest ally *A.s. jebelmarrae* of Darfur. It is, as far as is known, restricted to Aïr in Niger. Off the coast of the Horn of Africa the insular *A.s. sokotrae* Hartert, 1917: Alilo Pass, Socotra, is confined to the said island. This form is heavily streaked above, but lacks the reddish nuance present in the majority of the mainland races dealt with here. Below, the entire surface is whitish and heavily streaked with dark brown, while the size is as in *A.s. nivescens*.

Study of the variation in *A. similis* in the south of the Arabian Peninsula reveals that not all the populations are referable to *A.s. arabicus* as presently understood, and that in addition to *A.s. nivescens* (as above), *A.s. decapitus* Meinertzhagen, 1920: Rud-i-Taman, Iranian Baluchistan, must now be listed



as the race occurring in Muscat and Oman and the Trucial States. This taxon is plainer and still greyer above than *A.s. nivescens*, buffier below, and is longer winged and tailed (wings in ♂♂, 98–104, ♀♀ 92–97 mm).

In the case of the West African *A.(s.) bannermani* Bates, 1930: Birwa Peak, Sierra Leone, described as a race of *A. richardi* Vieillot, further consideration of its status suggests that it lies very close in both colouration and morphology to *A. latistriatus* Jackson, 1899: Kavirondo, southwestern Kenya, as defined recently in Clancey (1984 (1985) and 1985), and is probably better associated with this complex than with any other, becoming *A.l. bannermani*. The case will be argued in depth elsewhere.

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## The holotype of the Laysan Finch *Telespiza cantans* Wilson (Drepanidini)

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The finch of Laysan Island in the northwestern Hawaiian chain has throughout most of its history been recognized under the specific name *Telespiza cantans*, proposed by Wilson (1890), who named the species on a single living specimen that he had in captivity at the time. However, because this form was originally erroneously attributed to Midway Island (Wilson 1890), and because it has been suggested by Munro (1944) that Wilson's specimen came from Nihoa Island, where a resident population of finch was later described under the name *Telespiza ultima* Bryan (1917), the identity of Wilson's original specimen





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