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TERRITORIAL BEHAVIOUR AND VOCALISATIONS OF AFRICAN ROCK PIPIT *ANTHUS CRENATUS* AT LUNDIN'S NECK, BARKLY EAST

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Little is known about the territorial and breeding behaviour of the African Rock Pipit *Anthus crenatus* (ARP). The breeding season of this species is mainly from October to December and this period is characterised by the increased calling behaviour of these birds (Voelker 2005; de Swardt 2006). Although widely considered shy and difficult to approach, studies on the vocalizations and behaviour of ARPs in the Free State and adjacent areas shows this not to be the case (pers obs). In an ongoing study on the call variations between populations of this species (de Swardt 2010), a fieldtrip was undertaken to the Barkly East district in the Eastern Cape bordering on Lesotho. From 11-15 November 2013 ARP song recordings were made of birds from this eastern high altitude areas.

A Sony TCM-M10 recorder with a Brodan outdoor microphone system was used to make the recordings. The recordings were analysed afterwards with Raven 1.4 Pro software and sonograms were prepared to compare with the results of recordings at other sites as part of the ongoing study on vocalisations of the African Rock Pipit.

On 12 November 2013 at about 09:00 the following observations were made at Lundin's Neck (S30°37.882' E27°43.540'):

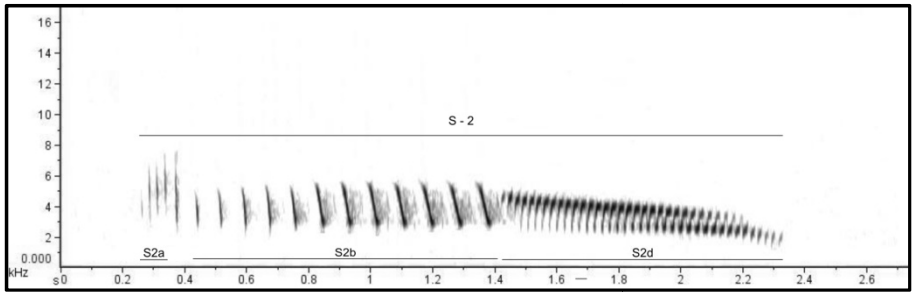

Fig 1 – The sonogram of an African Rock Pipit vocalisation illustrates the "*thrrrrrrr-treeeeu*" (S2b and S2d) sound of song sub-element 2 (S2). Note the abscence of the whistle of sub-element 1 (S1) during the vocalization. During the "*treeeeu*" trilling sound of syllable 2, which is repeated several times, the bird's body were observed to vibrate extensively.

A male African Rock Pipit was showing interesting territorial behaviour which was not previously recorded. This behaviour was accompanied by song variations which showed on later analysis to be unknown up to then. The bird was perched on a song post and responded immediately to playback of an ARP call on a commercially available recording of Gillard (1983). The bird was approximately 10 m away when the recording was made. It perched on a small boulder when calling and displaying the territorial behaviour described below.

The vocalisation started with a "*treeeeu*" note (S2d), then continued with a trilling "*thrrrrrrr*" (S2b) and the song phrase ended with the "*treeeeu*" note (Fig 1). This vocalisation was without the first characteristic whistle syllable (S1) of the well-known call (de Swardt (2010). The trilling note of the syllable (or sub element – S2) consisted of 12 sub-elements (S2b) (length 0.955 s) and was a quite intense trilling sound at a high frequency (Fig 1). During this vocalisation the bird's whole body was observed to vibrate extensively while producing the trilling "*thrrrrrrr*" (S2b) part of the call.

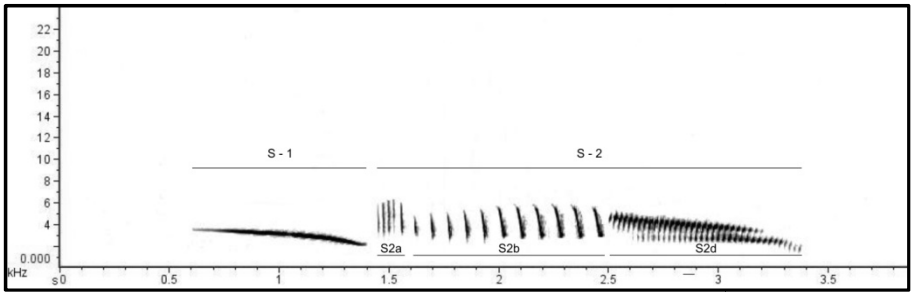

Fig 2 - Sonogram of an African Rock Pipit vocalisation with the whistle like sub-element 1 (S1) of song, followed by sub-element 2 (S2) during the same song bout. The whistle like vocalisation sounded similar to that of Eastern Long-billed Lark display vocalisations, from a high to a low frequency.

In the latter part of its song bout, the bird changed its song phrase to include the first syllable of the song, the "whistle" element (S1) (Fig 2). Interestingly, the first element of the song was a whistle from a high to a low frequency which sounded very similar to the display call of the Eastern Long-billed Lark *Certhilauda semitorquata*.

Earlier the same morning male birds (or perhaps a female) were observed calling in exactly the same way, that is they only vocalised the second syllable. Alternatively, when the first syllable was vocalised, the song sounded similar to that of an Eastern Long-billed Lark. Later during the fieldtrip the same calls were recorded at other localties in the same area.

African Rock Pipits had been observed (and recorded) on previous occasions calling the first whistle syllable note repeated a few times and then continued with the full song during a song bout (unpubl. data). These vocalizations consisted only of the whistle note (S1) and seemed to be an alert or anxiety call.

Fig 3 - The African Rock Pipit at Lundin's Neck in a territorial display posture.

When the pipit was not calling, it moved around on the ground with wings drooping, tips nearly touch the ground, and head held low (Fig 3). During a singing bout, it will lift its tail in the air showing a territorial posture and running on the ground or rocks with its cocked tail. The possibility exists that the male had a nest site in the area which probably explains this unusual territorial behaviour. The bird allowed me to approach closely and was moving on the ground to different perch sites. It was observed in the same location during the whole observation period of about an hour.

The same behaviour was previously observed in Lesotho during November 2007 of a singing male (pers. obs.). In a drawing by

Peacock (2006) the same territorial posture is illustrated – this time of an African Pipit *A. cinnamomeus*. Peacock further suggests that this behaviour may possibly occur in the closely related Richard's Pipits *A. richardi*.

No published information on this territorial behaviour could be traced and these particular observations of an African Rock Pipit male probably represent the first.

The vocalisations discussed in this paper can be accessed at the following links:

First call:
http://internal.adu.org.za/upload/uploads/ARP_LundinsnekBEast_001.mp3

Second call:
http://internal.adu.org.za/upload/uploads/ARP_LundinsnekBEast_002.mp3

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