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AVIAN VOCALISATIONS

A NEW CALL NOTE FOR THE AFRICAN ROCK PIPIT

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African Rock Pipits *Anthus crenatus* (hereafter ARP) have an unique song vocalisation which has been described previously, namely a 2-note vocalisation which starts with a whistle-like note (or syllable) and ends with a trilling second syllable – a "whee-tsreee" or a "wheeu-prrreeu" vocalisation (see Peacock 2002; Voelker 2005; de Swardt 2010). Research further shows that ARP have at least three song types with two main types: in the first song type the second syllable is at a horizontal frequency and, in the second song type, the second syllable starts with a high frequency and ends with a lower frequency (de Swardt 2010). Other vocalisations in this species were unknown and only the alarm call and territorial vocalisations were described recently (de Swardt 2014, 2016). This note reports another vocalisation in this species, namely the call note and other vocal observations associated with breeding behaviour.

During fieldwork in the Middelburg district of the Eastern Cape, South Africa, the following observations are of interest. On 26 January 2017 the part of the farm Grootfontein Quarry (31° 30' 13.6"S, 25° 03' 35.2"E) (which is part of Grootfontein Agricultural College) was visited to search for ARPs to obtain sound vocalisations. While I surveyed the hilly area (and using playbacks of ARP calls to obtain vocal responses), a singing male was heard calling from the large boulders of the hilly area. When I started to record vocalisations, I

moved closer to the singing ARP. The bird then flew away towards the flat area between the ridges and was accompanied by other two ARP individuals and they perched on a nearby ant heap and the third bird perched on a dry branch of a low shrub. The bird then started to vocalize a "tjirp-treeu tjirp-treeu" call which was repeated 27 times from its perch (calls were recorded) and then flew away to another perch (sonogram, Figure 1). The male again start vocalizing and a Long-billed Pipit *A. similis* was also heard calling nearby. At one stage the Long-billed pipit was observed calling ca. 12 metres from the ARP male which was also vocalizing.

During this same period interesting breeding observations were obtained of males (and possibly pairs) responding to sound playbacks and flying from bush to bush or low rock to low rock in front of me. Interestingly, they responded more aggressively to their "own" sound vocalisation of similar calls (obtained from nearby areas) and started giving only the whistle like "wheee" note and then started vocalizing the full song, repeated several times. They were also observed giving a few alarm call vocalisation notes and then continued singing. This behaviour of ARP males and pairs was observed at the Hospitaalhoek (31° 28' 01.1"S; 24° 58' 25.6"E) farm outside Middelburg on 23 January 2017 (Figure 2). The birds were possibly breeding in the area, resulting in the positive vocal responses, and an adult bird was later seen at another site with food in its beak. They can sometimes sing for long periods - one male at Katkop, Cradock district on 20 October 2016 was singing for more than 40 minutes (and a recording time of 23 minutes was obtained).

The call note of the African Rock Pipits recorded during January 2017 in the Middelburg district, Eastern Cape, represents a new vocalisation for this species which was not previously recorded (Peacock 2002; Voelker 2005).

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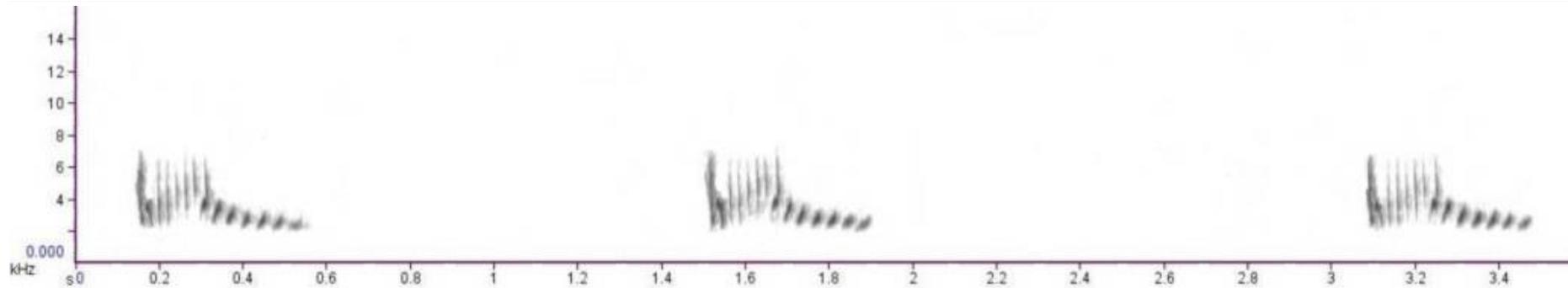


Figure 1 - African Rock Pipit call notes given by male bird from its perch at Grootfontein Quarry, Middelburg, Eastern Cape on 26 January 2017. Sound clip can be found on the ADU Virtual Museum at - <http://vmus.adu.org.za/?vm=BirdPix-34727>



Figure 2 - The pair at African Rock Pipits responding to song playbacks perched on low rock at Hospitaalhoek, Middelburg, Eastern Cape on 23 January 2017. The birds are probably breeding in the area. Record can be found on the ADU Virtual Museum at - <http://vmus.adu.org.za/?vm=BirdPix-34307>