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ALARM CALLS OF AFRICAN ROCK PIPIT *ANTHUS CRENATUS* – A NEW VOCALISATION

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The song of the African Rock Pipit *Anthus crenatus* (hereafter ARP) is described as a 2-note vocalisation which starts with a whistle-like note (or syllable) and ends with a trilling second syllable – a "wheet-sreee" or a "wheeu-prrreeu" vocalisation (Peacock 2002; Voelker 2005). De Swardt (2010) further described the vocalisations of ARP and recognised three song types: in the first the second syllable is at a horizontal frequency, in the second song type the second syllable starts with a high frequency and ends with a lower frequency while the 3rd song type starts with a descending trill and ends with a trill at a constant frequency. De Swardt (2010) also described individual and inter-population variations in the vocalisations of this species. De Swardt (2014) later described some interesting territorial behaviour in ARP where the individual first vocalises the song phrase without the first whistle-like syllable and gives a complex call of both a horizontal frequency sub-element and ends with a downward trilling note. The song phrase is later vocalised with the first syllable which resembles the whistle-like call of the Eastern Long-billed Lark *Certhilauda semitorquata* (De Swardt 2014). No other vocalisations for ARP had been described (Peacock 2002; Voelker 2005).

This paper reports a new vocalisation for this species, one that has not yet been described, namely the alarm call vocalisation. In field



Fig 1 – An African Rock Pipit calling from its perch.

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work observing behavioural patterns of ARP between March 1995 and December 2001 at Hagesdam (S29°21' E25°45') and Kloofeind

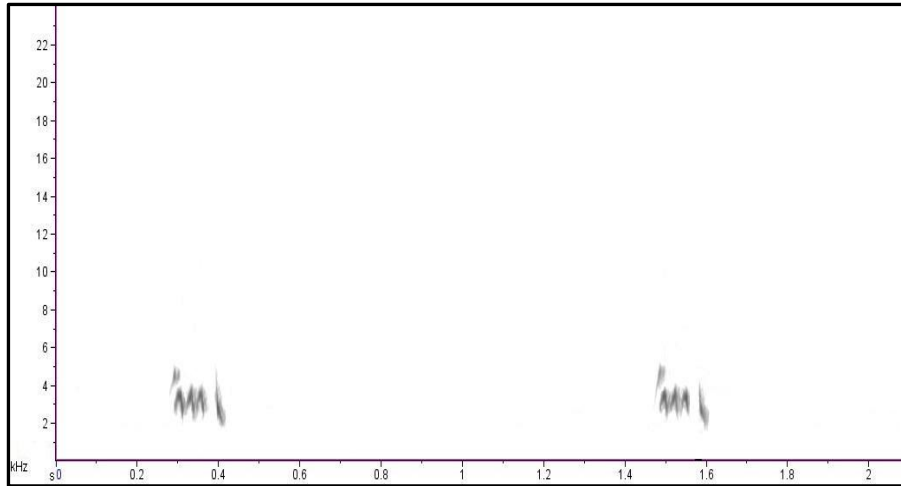


Fig 2 - Sonogram of the alarm call vocalization of African Rock Pipit recorded at Leeuberg, Ferreira, Bloemfontein on 4 October 2014. This bird was giving song phrases and started to give a few alarm calls.

(S29°09'; E26°02') near Bloemfontein and various localities elsewhere in the Free State (see De Swardt 2006, 2010 for description of study sites), a yet undescribed vocalisation for this species associated with its territorial behaviour had been noted. The ARP had given a "tjirp-tjirp" sparrow-like vocalisation when disturbed, which was repeated with 2–3 notes following that, (Fig 2; find sound clip here <http://vmus.adu.org.za/?vm=BirdPix-24865>). The note (or syllable) consisted of 4 sub-elements of the same frequency and a last 5th element which had a wider frequency range. The alarm call was followed in most instances by song phrase vocalisations. In a study on territorial behaviour between April 2000 and February 2003 at Hagesdam, Bloemfontein, this vocalisation was more frequently observed during the period March–August when ARP were less vocal after their breeding season which is from October–February (de Swardt and van Niekerk in prep; Fig 3).

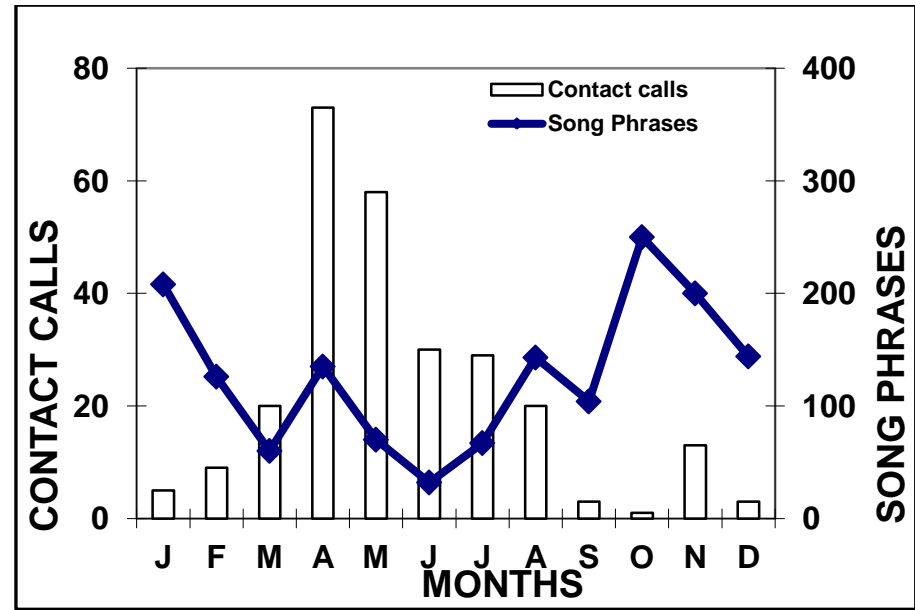


Fig 3 - Graph of monthly frequency of alarm calls of African Rock Pipit compared with monthly call frequency at Hagesdam study area between March 1995 and December 2001 (call frequency data De Swardt 2006).

ARP were frequently encountered in their preferred habitats giving their alarm calls during the winter months while doing SABAP2 surveys. During recent observations in the New Bethesda area in March 2015 ARP were found to be less vocal and were not responding to song playback. When in close proximity of an ARP male, the bird was observed to sound its "tjirp-tjirp" alarm call when disturbed and in most instances started singing its normal song phrases after giving the described alarm call.

African Rock Pipits are easily overlooked during the winter months when they are not calling frequently. This will have possible implications on projects such as SABAP2. Clancey (1997)

considered the seasonal fluctuations in reporting rates in ARP linked to increased vocalisations during the breeding season and posed that the species was under reported during the winter months. In winter this species was not located during surveys and probably under reported in certain areas where suitable habitat does occur. A higher calling frequency in October – March also confirmed this SABAP1 reporting rates and overlapped with this species' breeding season (De Swardt 2002, 2006; Voelker 2005).

This description of the alarm call will hopefully assist citizen scientists, members of the birding community and other fieldworkers in locating ARP during the winter months by recognising their alarm calls and associated behaviour.

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