

ed. The dark line through the eyes and dark lores serve to highlight the prominent, pale, buffy or creamy supercilium, which extends to the posterior edge of, or even beyond the ear-coverts. Similarly, the pale submoustachial stripe between the base of the lower

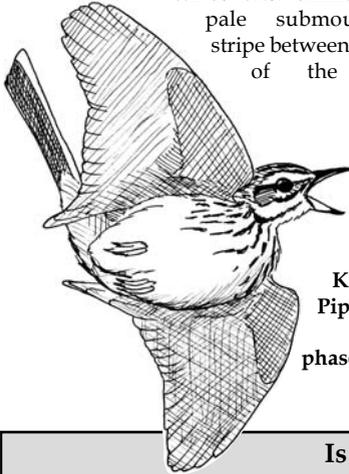


Fig. 82.
Kimberley
Pipit during
descent
phase of song
flight.

mandible (extending up behind the ear-coverts) is emphasized by the dark malar and moustachial lines. The chin is pale and unmarked. Head seems rounded, recalling shape of that of (smaller) Red-throated and Tree Pipits. Crown neatly marked, with dark, linear streaks and appears darker brown than the rest of the upperparts.

Underparts. The underparts are a pale buffy colour, shading to a whitish lower central belly and contrasting noticeably with the upperparts. The breast band is slightly darker than the rest of the underparts and is covered with broad, almost blotchy, darker streaks. Although the chest markings are clear, they are rather sparse and the breast is rarely heavily streaked. First year birds and breeding males have darker markings on the breast (Liversidge & Voelker 2002).

Is the Kimberley Pipit a valid species?

The formal scientific description of the Kimberley Pipit in 2002 by Richard Liversidge and Gary Voelker has not been accepted without question by both ornithologists and the birding community in general. Despite a number of convincing characters that differ between the Kimberley Pipit and the very similar Long-billed Pipit, there is still some ambiguity regarding the validity of this split. It has been demonstrated in many species that morphological similarity does not necessarily indicate relatedness (Liversidge & Voelker 2002) and when undertaking taxonomic studies, information of as many sub-disciplines of biological science as possible should be incorporated for an accurate conclusion. Apart from the subtle plumage differences mentioned in the text, the body shape, behaviour and vocalizations seem somewhat different.

Specimens or birds caught in the hand show a marked difference in relative primary lengths, with the 5th primary being appreciably shorter than the 6th, which is not the case in Long-billed Pipit. Furthermore, primary emargination and the lengths of the tertials is also distinct. Other morphological evidence that supports the Kimberley Pipit's validity includes the longer hind-claw and shorter culmen when compared to Long-billed Pipit. It must be stressed however, that these preliminary conclusions were based on a very small sample size and subsequent investigators have failed to confirm the claimed morphological differences between the Kimberley and Long-billed Pipits.

Although very few nests have been found to date, details of breeding biology seems to differ considerably between the Kimberley Pipit and the similar Long-billed Pipit. The former builds a well-concealed nest which is not visible from above, often with a short, roundish entrance tunnel. In contrast, Long-billed Pipits usually construct much more exposed nests, with some nests hidden by a fringe of overhanging grass blades. Egg colouration seems to further support the validity of the Kimberley Pipit—eggs are rather small and rounded, with a blue-white background and covered in dark blotches. Those of