

Yellow-breasted Pipit

Geelborskoester

Hemimacronyx chloris

Plate 7, p. 111



An uncommon and localized endemic to high-lying grasslands associated with the Drakensberg system of South Africa, Lesotho and western Swaziland, the Yellow-breasted Pipit is highly sought-after by both local and international birders. Further enhancing the bird's mystery is its secretive habits and limited range. Seeing a Yellow-breasted Pipit may require spending hours in cold, misty, windswept grasslands, but when this brightly coloured pipit eventually erupts from the grass, the reward is well worth the effort!

The taxonomic affinities of this species remains under investigation and it is here placed in a different genus than in most contemporary field guides (see comments under *Synonyms*). Unlike *Anthus* pipits it shows clear seasonal plumage variation, with a distinct non-breeding and breeding plumage. Sexual dimorphism (although not striking) is also more pronounced in this species.

Synonyms: Originally *Anthus chloris* Lichtenstein, 1842. *Verz. Samml. Kaffernl.* p13.

Type specimen from Likwa (=Vaal) River and Modder River, Free State, *vide* Stresemann 1954. *Ann. Mus. Roy. Cong. Belg.*, new ser. In 4, Zool. 1:81. Although originally placed in the same genus as all other pipits treated in this book (apart from the Golden Pipit *Tmetothylacus*), Roberts, 1922, *Ann. Trans. Mus.* 8:258, placed this species in a new genus, *Hemimacronyx*. The original genus of *Anthus* is still retained in many contemporary books and field guides but the Yellow-breasted Pipit is here treated under *Hemimacronyx*. Detailed arguments for this decision are presented elsewhere in this book.

Some of the unique characters of *Hemimacronyx* as opposed to *Anthus* include the bright ventral colouration (including underwings), dappled (rather than streaked) upperparts, long, pointed undertail-coverts, poorly developed rectal bristles and longer 5th primary. The Yellow-breasted Pipit was the type species of Roberts' genus *Hemimacronyx*, but Clancey (1990) also included the 'Kenyan Yellow-breasted Pipit' *Hemimacronyx sharpei*

Top identification features: Breeding plumage

Clear yellow underparts
Breast indistinctly streaked or plain
Clearly scalloped upperparts
Plain, greyish or brown hind-neck
White outer rectrices

Yellow underwing-coverts
High altitude grasslands (>15000m)
Fluttering display flight: *tseuu-chick* song
Secretive and difficult to flush
Similar to African Pipit in size and shape

Top identification features: Non-breeding plumage

Bright yellow spot on lower belly
Yellow underwing-coverts (visible in flight)
Saturated, dark brown upperparts & crown
Weakly streaked darker breast band
Very dark, scalloped, longclaw-like mantle

White, buff or rich brown below
White outer rectrices
Similar to African Pipit in size and shape
Secretive, with creeping posture
Characteristic calls