

Order Passiformes, Family Motacillidae, Genus Anthus.

Anthus australis adelaidensis—The Southern Pipit, or Ground Lark.

Description.—Crown of head, neck, and back brown, each feather margined with reddish brown, wings and two central tail feathers blackish brown, margined with light brown, outside tail feather on either side white, inner webs marked with dark brown, shafts almost white, the next tail feather on either side white, inner webs marked with brown, shafts black. The remaining tail feathers almost black, and in some instances slightly tipped with white. Under surface buffish white, feathers on the sides of the neck, breast, and flanks having a dark blackish brown stripe down the centre, throat white, line over the eye buffish white, ear-coverts reddish brown. Iris dark brown, bill dark brown, lower mandible flesh colour, feet and legs flesh colour. Birds from the same locality very much in coloration. There is little or no difference between male and female.

Total length of skin, 147 m.m.; wing, 82 m.m.; tail, 62 m.m. tarsus, 24 m.m.; bill, 13 m.m.

Distribution.—The whole of South Australia. It is represented throughout the whole of Australia, Tasmania, and the adjoining islands by closely allied subspecies. This bird prefers open grass land, although at times it is fairly plentiful in open forest country, but is never found in thick scrub. When scrub land is cleared for agriculture it is wonderful how soon the pipit appears, and in a few years it becomes one of the commonest birds.

Habits.—It spends practically the whole of its life upon the ground, though it may occasionally be seen perched upon a fence, or still more rarely upon a tree. It moves on the ground in a series of short, quick runs, bobbing the tail up and down two or three times each time it stops. If disturbed it hops upon a stone or other slight eminence to reconnoitre, and if further disturbed flies forty or fifty yards, then runs a few yards, stops, and runs again. If followed it will do this for perhaps half a mile, then rising to some height it will circle round and fly back to where it was first flushed. In common with other ground birds it feigns a broken wing if suddenly flushed from the nest.

Food.—Chiefly insects, which it catches upon the ground. It occasionally takes moths upon the wing, caterpillars living in the grass, and larvae and chrysales, which it finds hidden in the base of tussocks, also grass seeds to a small extent.

Flight.—Quick and slightly undulating; usually low. Now and then it may rise to a hundred feet or so, but it does not fly far unless pursued by a hawk or magpie, when it rises almost perpendicularly, keeping above its enemy, till it is often almost out of sight. So quickly does it rise that it is seldom, if ever, caught.

Song.—The song is not loud, but a very pleasing, high-pitched, trilling warble, uttered during its undulating flight. At this time it rises to a considerable altitude. When the song is finished it seems to almost fall straight down to its mate on the ground. It occasionally sings while perched upon a fence post. It only sings for a few weeks at mating time. The song and its habit of singing during its flight are very like a true lark. It also has an alarm call, which is a short chirrup, often repeated twice, uttered from its reconnoitring stone, or on leaving the ground when disturbed.

Nest.—This is placed in a depression in the ground, either made by the bird or in the footprint of a horse or cow, made when the ground is soft. It has been found in an empty jam tin, also in one instance in a broken bottle. It is often placed near a tussock of grass or small shrub, but sometimes quite in the open. The nest itself is a strong, well made, deep cup, about 7 c.in. internal diameter, composed outwardly of coarse grasses, finer grasses being used towards the lining, which is made of fine grasses, rootlets, and horsehair. Feathers and down are never used. The breeding season is extended. Fresh eggs may be found any time between the end of June and the beginning of January. The clutch is usually three, sometimes four, and two or three broods are reared each season.

Eggs.—Ground colour, greyish white, in some eggs with a faint tinge of bluish green. They are uniformly covered with small irregular spots and streaks of brown, sometimes so thickly as to completely hide the ground colour.

Average measurement of ten eggs, 2.20 c.m. x 1.64 c.m.

Largest egg, 2.35 c.m. x 1.75 c.m.

Smallest egg, 2.10 c.m. x 1.60 c.m.