

Order Passeriformes, Family Turdidae,  
Genus *Epthianura*.

*Epthianura albifrons*—The White-fronted Chat or Tin-tac.

Description (male).—Upper surface.—forehead, white; crown of the head and occiput, black; back of neck, dark grey; back, grey, each feather with a broad band of dark brown down its centre; rump, grey; upper tail coverts, black.

Under surface.—Chin, throat, and space round the eye, white, joining up with the white of the forehead, below the white a broad band of black crosses, the upper part of the breast joining up with the black of the occiput; rest of under surface, white; thighs, dull black, some of the feathers largely tipped with white. Wing, dusky black. Tail.—Two central feathers, black; lateral feathers, black, with their inner webbs largely tipped with white. Iris, reddish buff; bill and feet, black.

Total length (dry skin), 121 m.m.; wing, 70 m.m.; tarsus, 17 m.m.; bill, 10 m.m.

Female.—The whole of the upper surface, brown, each feather with a darker line down the centre. The white of the throat has a tinge of grey, and the pectoral band is dull black; abdomen, greyish white; flanks, grey. In some specimens there is a whitish line over, and extending behind, the eye. Wings, brown. Tail.—Two centre feathers, brown; lateral feathers, brown, tipped with white, as in the male. Young birds resemble the female, except that there is only an indication of the pectoral band, which is brown, and the

feathers of the back lack the median dark line. Bill, brown; legs and feet, brown.

Distribution.—All the southern parts of the State, including Kangaroo Island. It has been recorded as far as 400 miles north of Adelaide, and possibly extends still further. It is also found in Victoria, New South Wales, Tasmania, and Western Australia.

Habits.—They frequent open plains and swampy lands—samphire swamps and flats are favourite resorts. In the north they inhabit lightly timbered country and salt bush plains. They seldom perch in trees, but may often be seen on the tops of the samphire bushes or on wire fences. They are sprightly little birds, very pipit-like in their actions, running along the ground, and bobbing the tail up and down at each stop. Most of the food is taken upon the ground, though they occasionally search thistles or low bushes for insects, and now and then capture flying ants upon the wing. During the breeding season they are found in pairs, but after nesting is over young and old congregate in large flocks up to several hundreds, which move about the country in search of food supplies. They are nomadic rather than migratory, for some individuals are to be found on the Adelaide plains at all times of the year.

Food.—Insects and their larvae, occasionally small seeds.

Flight.—Low and jerky; not long continued, but when gathered in flocks they sometimes fly very high, and for long distances.

Song.—Consists of two or three simple notes. It is uttered chiefly when on the wing. The alarm call consists of two notes, said to resemble the words "tin-tac," hence its local name.

Nest.—They are very early breeders. Nests have been discovered early in July, and the young have often left the nest by the end of the month. The season extends until December, two, and sometimes three, broods being reared in that time. Both sexes sit, and when disturbed from the nest they flutter along the ground as though legs or wings were broken, or struggle on the back, as if in a fit, in order to entice the enemy from the vicinity. The nest is always built low down, often quite upon the ground in a tuft of couch grass or rushes—more often a few inches to two or three feet up in a samphire, salt bush, or thistle. Other favourite breeding places are prickly acacia and gorse bushes. They are favourite hosts of the narrow-billed bronze cuckoo. The

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nest is made externally of dry grass stems or fine twigs of samphire, and lined with horse and cow hair; feathers are not used. The egg cavity measures about  $1\frac{3}{4}$  inches in diameter by  $1\frac{1}{2}$  inches deep. The eggs are three or four in number. In the south three is the usual number, but in the north, if the season be good, four are generally laid.

Eggs.—Ground colour white, sparingly marked; with small rounded spots, varying in colour from deep red brown to black. The spots are grouped mostly about the large end, but only occasionally form a distinct ring.

Average measurement of 14 eggs, 18.4 m.m. x 13.5 m.m.

Largest egg, 19.0 m.m. x 14.0 m.m.

Smallest egg, 17.0 m.m. x 13.0 m.m.

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