

Order Passeriformes, Family Sylviidae,  
Genus *Megalurus*.

By A. M. Morgan, M.B., B. Ch.

*Megalurus gramineus*—The Little Grass-bird.

Description.—Upper surface, head, neck, upper back brown, each feather with a broad stripe of dull black in the centre; lower back and upper tail coverts, light yellowish-brown; over the eye a line of dull white. Under surface, chin white, with a few dark-brown spots; neck white, strongly spotted with dull black; breast, dull white; abdomen, dull yellowish-white in centre changing to buff on the flanks and under tail coverts and thighs; wing primaries, dull black; secondaries, dull black, edged with dull white; greater coverts, dull black, edged with fawn; under wing coverts, dull white; tail, dark brown, the shafts and a narrow line down the centre of each feather, black; bill brown; legs and feet, pale brown; iris dark brown. The sexes are alike in colour.

Total length of skin, 14 c.m.; wing, 5.4 c.m.; tail 6.5 c.m.

Distribution.—The whole of the southern part of Australia, including Tasmania and Kangaroo Island. It is a common bird during the summer months on the islands of St. Vincent and Spencer Gulfs, and they are still fairly numerous in the City of Adelaide, on the banks of the Torrens and in the Botanical Gardens.

Habitat.—Low-lying swampy country where there are reedbeds or samphire flats. On the Murray and Darling Rivers they are very numerous in the flooded country during high rivers, and breed in the half-submerged polygonum bushes.

Habits.—In the southern parts of South Australia they are migratory, arriving early in August and leaving some time towards the end of February or early in March; a few, however, remain throughout the winter, perhaps more than is generally supposed, as they are silent at that season of the year and are not conspicuous birds at any time. They live amongst the reeds or samphire, which they leave only to cross from one patch to another. In the reeds they are lively and quick in threading their way. They are inquisitive and easily called up by imitating their call. The tail is carried partly erect, but not carried over the back as with the *maluri*.

Flight.—Fluttering, of short duration, rarely more than a few yards from one clump of reeds to another.

Call.—Two or three long-drawn-out mournful whistles repeated at short intervals,

Food.—Small insects,

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Nesting Season.—From the middle of August till the end of November, September being the principal breeding month.

Nest.—An open cup-shaped structure, built externally of dried grasses, strips of reeds or paper-bark, and mainly lined with feathers. As a rule two large curved feathers are built into the top of the nest in such a way as to completely cover the opening. A nest found at the Grange, S.A., on September 15th measured, height over all 9.5 c.m., depth of cavity 5.0 c.m., opening 40 x 50 c.m.

Eggs.—Three or four in a clutch. The nest mentioned above contained five eggs, but this is the only occasion on which I have seen so many. The eggs are long and oval, surface dull, ground colour white strongly speckled with dark red, sometimes so thickly as to almost conceal the ground colour.

Average measurement of nine eggs, 1.88 x 1.38 c.m.

Largest egg, 2.0 x 1.40 c.m.,

Smallest egg, 1.85 x 1.40 c.m.

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