

Order Passeriformes, Family Prionopidae,
Genus Grallina.

Grallina cyanoleuca—Magpie Lark.

Description.—Male—Upper portion of head, neck, back, throat, and breast, black, with a blue metallic lustre; a broad line above, and a short crescent below the eye; ear coverts and sides of neck, white, leaving a black horizontal line, extending from the eye to the occiput; primaries and secondaries, black, tipped with white, the latter white at the base;

upper and under wing coverts, white; rump, upper tail coverts and tail, white; the tail with a broad black subterminal band, which is broadest on the central feathers, and decreases in width towards the distal portion of the outer ones; all tail feathers tipped with white; bill, yellowish white, with a dark brown streak along the apical portion of the culmen, extending to the tip; legs and feet, black; iris, yellowish white. Measurements.—Total length of skin, 260 m.m.; wing, 180 m.m.; tarsus, 44 m.m.; culmen, 19 m.m.

Female.—Lores, forehead, and throat, white; no white above or below the eye; a broad black vertical band extends from the crown of the head, through the eye, to the black pectoral band, otherwise the plumage is similar to that of the male.

Distribution.—The whole of the mainland of Australia, Kangaroo Island, and accidentally in Tasmania.

Habits.—They are graceful and handsome birds that spend most of their time on the ground at the borders of streams and pools, looking for their food in the soft mud. Damp, grassy flats, paddocks, and lawns are also favourite hunting grounds. They are never found far from water. The gait is walking or running, resembling that of the European starling. During nesting time they are found in pairs, and for some time after go about in small flocks, consisting of the old birds and their young of the year. In later autumn and winter they gather into quite large flocks, which move about their own district, but do not migrate.

Song.—A loud, shrill note, resembling pee-wit or knee-deep. In the nesting season they have a second, more melodious, note, like choo-woop.

Flight.—Slow, heavy, and flapping, often turning the body from one side to the other.

Food.—Insects, grubs, worms, and small snails, generally taken from mud or wet ground. They are said to destroy the fresh water snail, which acts as the intermediate host of sheep fluke. They will eat grain, for many are killed with poisoned wheat every year.

Nesting.—The breeding season lasts from August to December. Three broods are often reared. The nest is placed upon a horizontal branch, nearly always overhanging water. The height from the ground varies from six to 50 feet. The nest is built of mud, strengthened with straw. It

is lined with dry grass, fine twigs, or leaves, and generally a few feathers. Occasionally it is built of wet cow dung. An average sized nest measures $3\frac{1}{2}$ inches high, cavity 5 inches in diameter by $2\frac{1}{2}$ inches deep.

Eggs.—Two to five are laid for a clutch, usually three, but four is common. They vary much in shape and colour, some being short and rounded, and others much elongated. Two common types are, (1) ground colour, white to pinkish white, with irregular blotches of brick red forming a zone at the larger end; (2) ground colour white, with a zone of dull purplish red spots and splashes at the larger end, sometimes wavy, semicircular or spiral streaks occur in this type.

Average measurement of 17 eggs, 2.90 c.m. x 2.10 c.m.

Largest egg, 3.00 c.m. x 2.15 c.m.

Smallest egg, 2.70 c.m. x 2.15 c.m.
