

CHTHONICOLA MINIMA.

Little Chthonicola.

Anthus minimus, Vig. and Horsf. in Linn. Trans., vol. xv. p. 230.

THIS pretty little bird is usually seen on the ground in small companies of five or six in number, and is so very tame in disposition as to admit of the nearest approach, and when flushed merely flits off to the distance of a few yards. Its distribution, so far as we yet know, is confined to New South Wales and South Australia, in both of which countries it is a stationary and abundant species. It is very active in its actions, running, or rather hopping, with great celerity over the gravelly ridges of the ground beneath the shade of the apple- and gum-trees.

The nest is of a domed form, and is placed among withered grass in a depression of the ground, so as to be on a level with the surface, and being formed of the same material as that with which it is surrounded, it is all but impossible to discover it; the entrance is an extremely small hole close to the ground. The eggs, which are four in number, are of a light cochineal-red, with a zone of blackish brown spots at the larger end; their medium length is nine lines by seven lines in breadth.

The sexes are very similar; some individuals however are distinguished by the superciliary stripe being brown instead of white; whether this be characteristic of youth or maturity, I have not satisfactorily ascertained; I can scarcely conceive that so trivial a difference should indicate a difference of species.

General plumage olive-brown, the feathers of the back with darker centres, and of the head with a longitudinal stripe of buff down the middle of each; primaries narrowly edged with whitish; tail slightly tipped with white; under surface white, washed with yellow, each feather with a broad stripe of blackish brown down the centre, except on the middle of the abdomen, which is nearly pure white and without stripes; irides straw-yellow; bill brown; feet fleshy brown.

The figures are of the natural size.