ANTHUS PRATENSIS.

Meadow-Pipit, or Titlark.

Alauda pratensis, Linn. Syst. Nat., tom. i. p. 287.
——— *campestris*, Lath. Ind. Orn., vol. ii. p. 495.
Anthus pratensis, Bechst. Naturg. Deutsch., tom. iii. p. 732, tab. 36. fig. 2.
Alauda sepiaria, Brehm.
Anthus sepiarius, Vieill.
Leimoniptera pratensis, Kaup.

The Titlark is distinguished by four very opposite features—the plainness of its plumage, its general dispersion, the tameness of its disposition, and by the circumstance of its being preeminently the foster-parent of the Cuckoo. As to its distribution, it is so general that it may be said to be everywhere, but more particularly in those parts which have a tendency to humidity—the salt flats of the sea-shore, the watery meadows of our inland valleys and undrained lands, the highland glens, and the crowns of mountains, from the Peak of Derbyshire to the Grampians. The maid who gathers a handful of cowslips in our sunny meads, and the tourist who breasts the wind, sleet, and rain on the top of Snowdon, equally flush this little bird from under their feet, and whenever this occurs it merely flits off to the distance of a few yards, utters its short *peep-peep*, and pitches again into the grass. When my thoughts are directed to the Cuckoo and its mysterious ways, I feel that I know little more respecting it than that it is a parasite, and depends upon other birds for the rearing of its progeny. But how strange is it that it should select so frail a creature as the Meadow-Pipit in preference to most other birds for this purpose. What a task it must be for this little insect-eater to supply the demands and rear the young of so large a bird as the Cuckoo, which is twenty times its own weight, and with a mouth sufficiently large to engulf the head and body of the bird which brings it food! yet so it is.

In point of structure this delicately formed species is allied to the Yellow Wagtails (genus *Budytes*). Like them, it runs nimbly over the grass and among the clods of earth; like them, also, it makes a similar movement with the tail; on the other hand, in the colouring and the character of its plumage, it offers an alliance to the true Larks. In its mode of nesting and in the colouring of its eggs it may be said to be intermediate between the two.

To say that the Titlark has no song would be untrue, at the same time it is only an apology when compared with that of the Skylark. Its mode of rising and singing in the air in the exuberance of its feelings during the pairing and breeding-season is also a very feeble representation of the actions of that bird. "The song of the male," says Macgillivray, "is composed of a series of sharp modulated notes, which it utters on wing, first ascending silently, or emitting its usual cheep, to the height of about twenty yards, and then descending with expanded wings and tail. Sometimes also it sings when perched on a stone or crag. Its song may be heard from the middle of April to the end of July."

The Titlark is a constant resident with us; and although I have spoken of its frequenting the summits of our highest mountains, it is only in open weather that it is found in such situations; for, unlike the Ptarmigan, which burrows in the snow when those elevated regions are covered with the white fleece, the Titlark must then descend to the running springs and rills of the mountain-side, or change its residence to the low lands, or even to the sea-shore; and if the weather be unusually severe, to a more distant part, where, the temperature being higher, it can still find food. It soon returns, however, to the drear heathery land; for there, in the company of the Grouse and the Plover, it is more at home.

The sexes are so much alike that it is impossible to say offhand which is a male and which is a female of any two birds that may have been shot. Fresh-moulted specimens are brighter, and have a yellower tinge of green than those whose feathers have been carried for a long time; still there is little difference observable among specimens procured at any season. The long, straight, and finely-formed hind claw indicates that the ground is the Titlark's natural province; and accordingly it is seldom seen to perch, except on the top of a stone or the wall of a dyke.

The distribution of the Titlark over other countries is considerable. It is a common bird in Iceland, and is stated to have occurred in Greenland. Its range extends to the extreme limit of northern Europe; and Mr. Wolley states that it is as common in some parts of Lapland as in England. In all countries lying southward, as far as Algeria, it is as frequently to be met with as in the British Islands. It also doubtless occurs in Eastern Asia; but I question whether it is ever found in India, and I fear I must have misled Mr. Yarrell when I stated that I had seen specimens from thence. Temminck includes it