ANTHUS OBSCURUS.

Rock Pipit.

Alauda obscura, Lath. Ind. Orn., vol. ii. p. 494.
Spipola obscura, Leach, Syst. Cat. of Indig. Mamm. and Birds in Brit. Mus., p. 22.
Alauda petrosa, Mont. in Trans. Linn. Soc., vol. iv. p. 41.
Anthus obscurus, Keys. et Blas. Wirbelth. Eur., p. 48.
——— *petrosus*, Flem. Hist. Brit. Anim., p. 74.
——— *rupestris*, Nilss. Orn. Suec., tom. i. p. 245, tab. 9 ?
——— *immutabilis*, Degl. ?

The visitor to the sea-side of almost any portion of our coast cannot tread the beach for an hour without springing the Rock Pipit, a bird which will be easily recognized by its jerking shuffling flight, and by the short cry of "*pepe, pepe*," which it utters while in the air. If watched, it will be seen to settle again at no great distance from the spot whence it started, and the observer will not fail to notice that its long legs and toes enable it to run nimbly over the surface of the round slippery stones, patches of soft mud, and masses of hard rock fallen from the neighbouring cliff, all of which are conspicuous features in the true home of the Rock Pipit. In such situations it resides from year's end to year's end, despite of frost, sleet, rain, or the wind-blown salt spray of the ocean.

In my account of the Tawny Pipit, I remarked upon the similarity in the colour of its plumage to that of the sandy situations it frequents, namely, open sterile districts, and such hot and parched situations as occur in many parts of France, Spain, and Italy; and a similar correspondence in hue is also observable in the sombre olive-coloured plumage of the present bird, and the kelp and oozy mud-flats upon which it lives.

So widely is this bird distributed over our shores that it may be found in all suitable situations from Cornwall to the Orkneys, from the most eastern part of England to Wales and the extreme west of Ireland. An exception, however, to this general distribution occurs with regard to the county of Norfolk; for Mr. Stevenson states that, although he has sought for the bird in every likely locality and at the proper season, he has never met with it there, and had seen but three specimens in the hands of the Norwich bird-stuffers. "In the month of February, 1855, a single bird was shown to me (killed near Yarmouth during very severe weather) which corresponded with specimens procured by myself in Devonshire and Sussex; and two others in my own collection were secured at one shot on the river's bank, near St. Martin's Gates, quite close to the city, on the 7th of March, 1864. These were, no doubt, passing over in their migratory course, and had paused for a while to rest and feed even in a locality so unusual for a bird whose haunts are the 'rock-girt shore' and the margin of brackish water: Messrs. Gurney and Fisher speak of the Rock Pipit as migratory to our coast in autumn; and Messrs. Paget remarked that 'a few are occasionally seen at Breydon Wall.' Mr. Dix informs me that on the brackish margin of the Orwell, near Ipswich, they are not uncommon in autumn; he has killed examples there, and one would naturally expect to find them as plentiful in similar situations in our own county." (Birds of Norfolk, vol. i. p. 169.) Its nest is made in the chink of a rock, under a stone, or beside a tuft of grass, and the young remain in the neighbourhood, affect no change of locality, and do not, like the Swallow, migrate to other countries.

The Rev. Mr. Tristram once brought me some Irish skins of a Rock Pipit which he thought different from those ordinarily found on our shores; the difference they presented, however, if I recollect rightly, was but slight, being confined to a greater amount of white on the outer tail-feathers, a feature very marked in the *Anthus ludovicianus* of America; it is possible that they may have been examples of that or some other fawn-breasted species in the spotted plumage.

Besides the shores of the British Islands, this bird is found on those of the Mediterranean in the south, and on those of the Baltic in the north; Mr. Newton informs me that it even occurs round the North Cape; and Mr. R. E. Dresser tells me that Pastor Sommerfelt, in his 'Notes on the birds of Varanger Fjord,' remarks that *A. obscurus* is not uncommon there. It arrives in the beginning of April, and is the last songster that leaves about the middle of November. It nests on the fjords, but not so commonly as on the sea-coast. Mr. Dresser found it breeding at Uleaborg, in Finland; but it is rare there. "Its food," says Macgillivray, "consists of insects, larvæ, small molluscous animals, and seeds of various kinds, in searching for which it mixes with the Meadow Pipits, and sometimes with Snowflakes and Sky Larks. In summer, when masses of sea-weed happen to be cast on the shore and become putrid, they find among them an abundant supply of larvæ; and at all seasons they frequent the ebb, in order to pick up shell-fish and other marine animals, often mingling with Turnstones, Redshanks, and Purres. The flight of this

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