Australian Pipit - *Anthus australis*

The Australian Pipit - *Anthus australis* - (also known as Richard's Pipit) is dull brown streaked with brown camouflage over the back with brown-centred, cream-edged feathers. A cream-white eyebrow is distinctive. White lining either side of the tail. Underside is creamy-white with broken vertical brown streaks on the breast. Eye brown; bill and feet are horny to horny-pink in colour. Male and female are similar. Length is 17 to 18 centimetres.

The pipit lives on the ground in open country including wet heath, pastures, arid scrub, samphire, beach and grassed clearings in woodland. The pipit eats, sleeps and nests on the ground. It runs along the ground to feed, darting here and there to pick up food - grasshoppers, ants, caterpillars, beetles, other insects and occasionally seeds. Running is interrupted to perch on low stones or similar higher points, wagging the tail up and down. When alarmed it flies to the top of a bush on a bare branch or on a fence post.

Similar to lark and sparrow in appearance. Pipit legs are longer than lark or sparrow, the beak is also longer than the other species. At first sight, a pipit may be identified as a female house sparrow but a sparrow doesn't run along the ground the way a pipit does.

Lives over nearly all of Australia, running, feeding, sleeping and nesting on the ground in all climates and in all seasons. Not nomadic or migratory, although populations in the Snowy Mountains descend to lower altitudes in winter. Often gathers in scattered flocks of up to 100 birds.
There is little variation in plumage across Australia. Birds on the coastal plains of the north-west are smaller and darker with heavier black spotting on back and breast.

Pipits break up into pairs for breeding from August to January. Males advertise and display with a song flight rising from a low perch, flying high and diving, swooping and rising on spread wings, singing with highest volume at the bottom of each dive. Males also trill from vantage points on rocks, stumps and bushes.

The nest is a shallow cup of grass, plant material, and sometimes hair, in a depression in the ground; often sheltered by tussock, shrub, stone or piece of wood. Two to four eggs are laid, off-white or light brown, spotted with dark grey and brown; tapered oval, about 23mm by 17mm. Incubation takes about 13 to 14 days; the female mainly incubates while the male stands guard nearby. Both parents feed the young. Nesting period is about 13-14 days.

Synonym - *Anthus novaeseelandiae*. 

**Left. Pipit at Coober Pedy, SA.**

**Right. Pipit on the Great Alpine Road near Mount Hotham, Vic, showing the long, pink legs.**