

Meadow Pipit



Photos: © Robbie Murphy

Scientific Name: *Anthus pratensis*
Irish Name: Riabhóg Mhóna

By Lewis Gospel

The meadow pipit is a small bird and is part of the pipit family. As the first half of its name suggests it can be found in areas of wide open country. The second half of its name dates back all the way to 1768, when it used to be called a tit lark! It is a hard species to tell apart from others in the pipit family. If you look closely it has a thin bill and white, pale pinkish yellow legs with a hind claw at the back of the feet. This claw is a lot longer than its other claws.

It mostly likes to eat on the ground and its favourite food in summer are insects and wriggling earthworms. In winter it likes to eat seeds and berries. These give it plenty of energy when other food is not as plentiful.

How you can spot it!

If you find yourself in any grassland, heath or moor listen out for a squeaky 'tsip'-like call as the Meadow Pipit travels in little flocks. Be sure to look where you are walking, as these little birds like to nest on the ground. If disturbed they will rise in ones or twos, or in a little body or group. The Meadow Pipit looks a lot like its close relative the Tree Pipit, and in Ireland there is a subspecies called '*Anthus pratensis whistleri*' that is a little darker than the ones you find in other countries in Europe.



FACT FILE

Colour: Light brown body with darker streaks of brown with pink and yellowish legs.

Length: 14.5 cm

Wingspan: 24 cm

Weight: 14.5 g

Eggs: 2-7

Diet: Insects, earthworms, seeds and berries

Pest!

When the Meadow Pipit is nesting in the breeding season it may get an unwanted visit from the cuckoo. The cuckoo is a 'brood parasite', which means it lays its eggs in the nests of another birds. In Ireland, their main host species is the Meadow Pipit. In the nest the cuckoo's egg hatches first and the chick then 'evicts' or pushes out the Meadow Pipit's eggs. It is all part of nature though and it doesn't affect the population of Meadow Pipits because the cuckoo lives off other birds as well.

