

## FRIENDLY NATIVE LARKS.

(By H. Ross, Southland.)

Nature-lovers in New Zealand are blessed with the presence of a bird, so quiet, so obviously desirous of our good-fellowship and help that, to me, it is a wonder we do not hear more about the little native lark (the pihoihoi, commonly known as the pipit or ground-lark). Its varied snatches of song are as bright and colourful as its plumage is dull and sombre. Wherever we go—to the peaty, moss-clad swamps, to the wind-swept, barren hill top, to the green, fertile meadow, or far inland to sun-scorched sand wastes—the native lark is ever to be found. Always bright and perky, ever with a great deal to say for himself, he scuttles beneath our feet, so close that we almost tread on him. Do we stop for a rest Mr. Lark stops, too. Usually perching upon a post, stump or stone, he impatiently awaits our continuance of our walk. Then, with a triumphant "Cree!" he gaily accompanies us.

In size and general appearance the native lark somewhat resembles the imported skylark. He is, however, not so yellowish about the head and he has no crest. Likewise, he is longer in the body and, I think, a trifle more corpulent than his English cousin. This latter fact, with the half-dozen or so native larks that practically live upon our lawn, may be due to the amount of food they obtain. In no sense can it be said that the native lark soars; indeed, it seldom makes a flight of more than two or three chains, preferring to run or to make low flights. It always moves in that manner when accompanying human strollers.

For about four years a pair of these larks lived on the lawn, coming to the porch several times a day for food. Year in, year out, they were always there, except during the month of August, when hundreds of silver-eyes appeared. The larks would never remain in company with the green birds. Directly I began feeding the strangers the larks vanished, and they did not return until after the silver-eyes had departed for their forest home.

This year the usual pair of larks have been joined by four more. They all usually put in an appearance at the door some time during the day for food. We find them very easily satisfied in the food line; bread, usually soaked in water, scraps of cooked meat and potatoes, cooked food of any kind, they seem to relish.

The food placed for them has attracted the fattest, most ostentatious cock sparrow I have ever seen. He perches upon