

WINTERING HABITS OF SOME BIRDS AT THE NEVADA ATOMIC TEST SITE

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In the fall of 1959, Brigham Young University began studies to determine the ecology of native animals in undisturbed and atomically disturbed areas at the Atomic Energy Commission test site in Nye County, Nevada. During the winter of 1960-1961, daily visits were made to feeding grounds and other areas of concentration of wintering species of birds. As a result of the nuclear weapons testing during the last eight years, native vegetation has essentially been destroyed in the vicinity of ground zeros, resulting in areas dominated primarily by *Salsola kali* L. These areas were used as feeding grounds by large flocks of horned larks and house finches. Flocks of these two species in these areas have been numbered as high as 5,000 birds. Flocks occurring in neighboring undisturbed areas were much smaller. Presumably, *Salsola* produced large amounts of seed that attracted large numbers of birds into these areas.

Eremophila alpestris (Linnaeus) . . . Horned Lark

The horned lark was the most common species wintering at the test site. Flocks in nuclear disturbed areas were estimated frequently at 2,500 birds. Smaller flocks of about 300 birds were observed throughout the test site. Horned larks were the only birds frequently observed inhabiting the playas which were void of vegetation.

Horned larks were seen in large flocks during the day, but there was no indication that they remained so while roosting at night. In the early morning in the *Atriplex confertifolia* (Torr & Frem.) and *Kochia americana* Wats. plant community, docile larks that were reluctant to fly were observed singly. Their inactivity probably was due to the cold, as they evidently preferred warmer temperatures before becoming active. It was not until about 10:00 a.m. that sizeable flocks were observed.

Carpodacus mexicanus (Muller) . . . House Finch

House finches wintered at the test site in large concentrations where they were restricted almost entirely to the nuclear disturbed areas. Flocks often were estimated in excess of 2,500 birds. Elsewhere house finches were observed in sizeable flocks only at Yucca Reservoir where flocks of about 300 birds were seen flying between the reservoir and the feeding grounds throughout the day.

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Richards, Gerald. 1962. "WINTERING HABITS OF SOME BIRDS AT THE NEVADA ATOMIC TEST SITE." *The Great Basin naturalist* 22, 30–31.

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