

HORNED LARKS AT AWEME, MANITOBA.

BY STUART AND NORMAN CRIDDLE.

There are few small birds better known than the Horned Larks when considered collectively, that is to say, when we merely recognize them as a species without attempting to divide and distinguish them as they have been separated by systematists. We are, for instance, all familiar with the Prairie Horned Lark, or think we are, until its close allies are placed alongside, when few indeed will be able to tell one from another. The fact that these birds have been divided into so many geographical races which are so alike in general appearance, makes them of particular interest to students of geographical distribution. The systematists have divided them and given them names. It remains for the workers in ecology to confirm or reject this classification by showing that there is, or is not, a difference in life habits. We doubt very much, whether two distinct races will ever possess identical habits and we hold that if these habits differ ever so little, then there is every reason to believe that the animals possessing them are distinct. A difference of a few days in the average date of arrival, the selection of a different situation or kind of locality for breeding purposes should be alone sufficient to demonstrate that there are two races involved. We have a case in point in the local Lapland Longspur migrations. With these birds there are two very marked differences, both as to time of arrival and departure. We have never actually demonstrated by collecting specimens, that there are two races involved, yet there can be little doubt that such is the case. Turning to our Manitoba Horned Larks, we have long realized that there were three or four races present, though it is only within recent times that the senior writer has actually shown this to be so by the collecting of examples. These specimens have been determined through the courtesy of Dr. Henshaw, by Mr. Oberholser of the U. S. Biological Survey, to both of whom the writers are under many obligations.

We have, so far, been able to recognize four horned larks in the vicinity of Aweme, Manitoba, namely: the Prairie Horned Lark, *Otocoris alpestris praticola*; Oberholser's Horned Lark, *O. a. enthymia*, the Pallid Horned Lark, *O. a. arctica*, and the Hoyt Horned Lark, *O. a. hoyti*. Of these the first two are summer residents in the neighbourhood, while the latter have only been noted as migrants.

PRAIRIE HORNED LARK.

This is the dominant race around the farm yard and seems to take more kindly to the haunts of man than do its allies. In nature it is found breeding in the vicinity of semi-wooded areas; uplands where the grass is sparse and the soil sandy seem to suit it best. It is far less of a true prairie bird than *enthymia* and while it invariably selects

open ground for nesting purposes, it is not uncommon to find such nests situated within a few feet of low trees or bushes upon which the males sometimes perch while singing.

The Prairie Horned Lark is the first of all migrants to return from the south and in consequence its arrival is heralded as the first harbinger of spring, a forerunner of the glories to come when animated nature awakens once more from its long winter's sleep. Even Manitobans admit that the winters, while invigorating, are, at times, a trifle long, hence the reappearance of the horned larks is a welcome one. They frequently return to us while the country is still under a mantle of snow but we feel, nevertheless, that their northward movements are impelled by Old Sol's persuasion and that it will not be long before this is demonstrated.

From an examination of records covering 20 years, we find that the first spring arrival reaches us, on an average, about February 22. At times they have been seen much earlier, at others, later. In autumn, the last to leave averages November 16. There are winters when odd individuals may be seen throughout the season, but these are exceptions.

The male horned larks, like so many other birds, arrive well ahead of the females, and until the latter appear remain comparatively quiet, contenting themselves with the daily search for food and with uttering, from time to time, that cheery little song with which we are all familiar. In a little more than two weeks the females appear, altering in a moment the peaceful existence of their mates to be. Individual combats are now of frequent occurrence and continue until both mates and nesting sites have been won. The males now exercise all their powers of song, rising high in the air during the day and at twilight making the whole countryside resound with their characteristic songs. In these efforts they continue as long as there is light and commence again in the morning at the first indication of dawn. To us there are few more cheerful songsters and as they frequently choose a singing perch within a few feet of the house we have every opportunity to judge of their merits.

Nests are invariably sunk into the ground so that their upper edge is little above its surface. At times some beautiful clump of anemonies may hide the young from view, at others there is practically no shelter, the birds apparently depending wholly upon their dull colours to hide them from their enemies. We have found nests with eggs in them about the middle of March and young birds able to fly on April 14. How they manage to survive the snow storms and cold, not uncommon at this time of year, is a mystery. That they do so there is no doubt. As a rule, however, the percentage of young reared in the early season is low and in the first brood one seldom meets with more than a single fully developed nestling, though in later broods three or four are often

reared. We find that the average number of broods is three, though at times there may be a fourth. In their domestic duties both birds take an active part, the male not only relieving the female upon the nest but also taking his share in feeding the young. In fact they are an excellent example of true domestic harmony, in as much as each contribute an equal share to the family welfare.

In 1916, a nest of this species was located in a garden among some old dead flowers. It suffered somewhat by being raked over before it was noticed, but was replaced with sufficient care to satisfy the old birds. They were an unusually tame couple and were thus able to be watched without disturbing their daily habits. It was seen that both were equally energetic in tending the young though the male was less frequently found upon the nest, while during the early morning and again in the evening, his musical tendencies overcame his usual domestic thoughts, or perhaps, as seems more likely, the young required less attention at such times, so he devoted his energy to a serenade for the benefit of his domestic little mate. Food for the young was secured close at hand and consisted of a mixed up mass of insect matter, as a rule unidentifiable. From this mass, however, numerous cutworms were seen hanging, from time to time, the identity of which was unmistakable. The female was particularly fearless and would continue her domestic duties while we watched from a few feet away. Thus we often saw her feed the young and likewise fit her body snugly over them afterwards. On June 27 one young bird had left the nest and was followed next day by the remaining one. Neither could fly at this time and both were frequently seen close at hand afterwards.

These birds remain for a considerable time around their homes after nesting and seldom, if ever, gather into flocks or congregate upon the ploughed fields as do other kinds of horned larks.

OBERHOLSER'S HORNED LARK.

We are less familiar with this bird than with the last and owing to the difficulty of determination, it was longer before we were able to distinguish it in the field. As was to be expected, birds so closely related as the horned larks have much in common concerning habits of living, though it is astonishing how many differences there are when they are studied closely. We shall not attempt to present the habits of this race in detail, as in a general way they resemble those of *praticola*, but will content ourselves by comparing the chief points of difference.

To begin with, *enthymia* is practically a month later in arriving from the south. Then, instead of arriving as odd individuals, as does the Prairie Horned Lark, it comes in flocks varying from seven to twenty or more, and at the height of the migration in bunches of

several hundred. Thus they are soon found in large gatherings upon ploughed fields, where they remain for about a month before dispersing for their nesting grounds. It is, therefore, May before they commence domestic duties, our earliest record for a nest with fresh eggs being May 3. In selecting their breeding grounds these birds show a preference for the larger plains which are well away from trees of any kind. They also nest in colonies like the Chestnut-colored Longspur, in fact the summer homes of these two birds are very similar. The nests of *enthymia* do not differ in any marked degree from those of *praticola*, but they are usually in rather denser vegetation.

Colonies of Oberholser's Horned Larks have been known to us for a number of years situated on a small plain north-west of our home. Another lot of almost a hundred have recently taken up their quarters on some deserted fields which they have occupied for the last two years.

The fact that this race is gregarious seems to account for the individuals being less pugnacious than the Prairie Horned Lark, and perhaps, also, for their being less musical. Our observations indicate that they rise less high in the air while singing and that their song is softer and the notes less distinct. On account of their lateness in commencing to nest it does not seem probable that there are more than two broods in a season. Nor do the birds remain as long upon their breeding grounds, but as soon as the nesting season is over they return to the ploughed fields, where they are joined later on by other kinds and so become hopelessly mixed from a naturalist's point of view.

Thus it will be seen that while these two breeding races are extremely difficult to tell apart, their habits are such as to leave no doubt as to their distinctness.

THE PALLID HORNED LARK AND THE HOYT HORNED LARK.

Of the Pallid Horned Lark—*articola*—and Hoyt Horned Lark—*hoyti*—we have little to write. They are, so far as we know, both migrants only, and pass to other parts for nesting purposes. They usually arrive within a few days of each other and with the Lapland Longspurs in large flocks about April 6. Soon the ploughed fields are swarming with them and their value as destroyers of noxious weed seeds must be considerable. At this time they are somewhat secretive. They nearly always run in a crouching attitude and squat down flat at the least alarm, when their colour resemblance to the surrounding landscape makes them almost invisible from a short distance away. The squatting action also prepares them for a spring upwards and as one rises, in alarm, the others quickly follow, so that in a moment thousands of birds are in the air rapidly darting up and down. Then suddenly they drop onto the field again and all is quiet as before.

It is an interesting sight to see these birds, in company with

thousands of Longspurs, circling for miles around some large hawk, though their object in doing so is a mystery and seems to be almost ignored by the hawk. Their music, as they fly around in millions, fills the air, producing an effect which is long remembered. Both Horned Larks and Lapland Longspurs may also be seen to rise some 30 feet, uttering as they drop a short song. It is evident, however, that this is only a prelude to what is to come when the birds reach their true homes.

NOTES.

Over seven hundred fragments of pipes made of pottery have been counted among the finds made in the prehistoric Iroquoian Indian site at Roebuck, Ontario, by Mr. W. J. Wintemberg, who explored there for the Geological Survey in 1912. Wagon loads of pottery and some charred corn and beans, but only four arrowheads chipped out of stone, being found here among other finds, suggest that the prehistoric inhabitants were apparently agriculturists who did not hunt and fight as much as we are generally led to believe that the Indians did. Over eighty graves were found, but only one contained anything besides the skeleton, the custom apparently being different from that among many other kinds of Indians.

An aged Maya Indian woman from near Progreso, Yucatan, is residing in Ottawa, undoubtedly the only person in the Dominion who can speak Maya. The Mayas are the remnants of the tribe that is believed to have built the most beautiful of the ruined cities of Mexico and Central America—the finest architecture of the New World.

Oyster and quahog shells were found by Mr. W. J. Wintemberg in exploring a shellheap on Mahone Bay, N.S., for the Geological Survey of Canada. The oyster and quahog have not been known to live on the southeastern or outside coast of Nova Scotia since the region was first visited by white people. The finding of these shells consequently suggests that the heaps are of considerable antiquity and is of interest to the students concerned with these shell fish as indicating that at least these two species formerly lived in the waters near Mahone Bay. While the Indians may have carried dried oysters and clams for some distance, it is hardly likely that they transported them in the shells or that they carried the shells from a distant place, especially since we do not find these particular shells were used by the Indians in this vicinity. In fact the Indians who left the shellheaps of the eastern coast of Canada did not use shell to any very great extent.



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