

California Wildlife Habitat Relationships System
California Department of Fish and Wildlife
California Interagency Wildlife Task Group

HORNED LARK

Eremophila alpestris

Family: ALAUDIDAE
B337

Order: PASSERIFORMES

Class: AVES

Written by: M. Green
Reviewed by: L. Mewaldt
Edited by: R. Duke, D. Winkler

DISTRIBUTION, ABUNDANCE, AND SEASONALITY

A common to abundant resident in a variety of open habitats, usually where trees and large shrubs are absent. Found from grasslands along the coast and deserts near sea level to alpine dwarf-shrub habitat above treeline. Less common in mountain regions, on the North Coast (McCaskie et al. 1979), and in coniferous or chaparral habitats. Mostly leaves mountains in winter, but small flocks may remain to winter on windswept, snow-free areas at high elevations in the Sierra Nevada (Gaines 1977b). In winter, flocks in desert lowlands and other areas augmented by winter visitants, many migrating from outside the state (Garrett and Dunn 1981). Resident on the Channel Islands (Garrett and Dunn 1981).

SPECIFIC HABITAT REQUIREMENTS

Feeding: Mostly eats insects, snails, and spiders during breeding season; adds grass and forb seeds and other plant matter to diet at other seasons (Bent 1942). Walks along ground, searching for food.

Cover: Grasses, shrubs, forbs, rocks, litter, clods of soil, and other surface irregularities provide cover.

Reproduction: Builds grass-lined nest; cup-shaped in depression on ground in the open.

Water: Drinks freely from waterholes, but individuals have survived in captivity for 16-31 days without water (Airola 1980).

Pattern: Frequents grasslands and other open habitats with low, sparse vegetation.

SPECIES LIFE HISTORY

Activity Patterns: Yearlong, diurnal activity.

Seasonal Movements/Migration: Yearlong, resident within the state. After breeding, becomes very gregarious; often forms large flocks that forage and roost together. Migrants from outside of California join these wintering flocks, especially in the southeastern desert region of the state. Migrant status on the Farallon Islands indicates a latitudinal movement along the coast as well (DeSante and Ainley 1980).

Home Range: No data found.

Territory: Verbeek (1967) estimated typical territory as 1.6 ha (4 ac) in Wyoming alpine tundra. In midwestern farmland, territory reported as 0.6 to 3.2 ha (1.5 to 8 ac) (Beason and Franks 1974), 0.4 to 5.3 ha (1-13 ac) (Pickwell 1931), and 4.9 ha (12 ac) (Fitch 1958).

Reproduction: Breeds from March through July, with peak activity in May. Pair nests solitarily; lays 2-5 eggs, average 3-4. Frequently raises 2 broods in a season (Bent 1942). Incubation 10-14 days; altricial young tended by both parents. Young leave nest at 9-12 days, and can fly 3-5 days later (Harrison 1978).

Niche: Eggs and nestlings subject to predation from mammals and snakes. Adults are prey for falcons.

REFERENCES

- Airola, D. A., ed. 1980. California wildlife habitat relationships program: Northeast Interior Zone. Vol III. Birds. U.S. Dep. Agric., For. Serv., Lassen Natl. For., Susanville. 590pp.
- Beason, R. C., and E. C. Franks. 1974. Breeding behavior of the horned lark. *Auk* 91:65-74.
- Bent, A. C. 1942. Life histories of North American flycatchers, larks, swallows, and their allies. U.S. Natl. Mus. Bull. 179. 555pp.
- DeSante, D. F., and D. G. Ainley. 1980. The avifauna of the South Farallon Islands, California. *Studies in Avian Biol.* No. 4. Cooper Ornithol. Soc., Lawrence, KA. 104pp.
- Fitch, H. S. 1958. Home ranges, territories, and seasonal movements of vertebrates of the Natural History Reservation. *Univ. Kans., Lawrence. Publ. Mus. Nat. Hist.* 11:63-326.
- Gaines, D. 1977b. Birds of the Yosemite Sierra. California Syllabus, Oakland. 153pp.
- Garrett, K., and J. Dunn. 1981. Birds of southern California. Los Angeles Audubon Soc. 408pp.
- Harrison, C. 1978. A field guide to the nests, eggs and nestlings of north American birds. W. Collins Sons and Co., Cleveland, OH. 416pp.
- Harrison, C. J. O., ed. 1978. Bird families of the world. Harry N. Abrams, Inc., New York. 264pp.
- McCaskie, G., P. De Benedictis, R. Erickson, and J. Morlan. 1979. Birds of northern California, an annotated field list. 2nd ed. Golden Gate Audubon Soc., Berkeley. 84pp.
- Pickwell, G. 1931. The prairie horned lark. *St. Louis Acad. Sci. Trans.* 27:1-153.
- Verbeek, N. A. M. 1967. Breeding biology and ecology of the horned lark in alpine tundra. *Wilson Bull.* 79:208-218.

B337

Life history accounts for species in the California Wildlife Habitat Relationships (CWHR) System were originally published in: Zeiner, D.C., W.F.Laudenslayer, Jr., K.E. Mayer, and M. White, eds. 1988-1990. California's Wildlife. Vol. I-III. California Department of Fish and Game, Sacramento, California. Updates are noted in accounts that have been added or edited since original publication.