

# Lark Sparrow Breeding at Nipawin

by **Maurice G. Street**, Nipawin

Little has been written regarding the distribution of the Lark Sparrow, *Chondestes grammacus*, in Saskatchewan. It is listed as an "uncommon summer resident" in the Cypress Hills (Godfrey, 1950) and as an "occasional summer resident" at Regina (Belcher, 1961), with several breeding records for each area. It is locally fairly common in the brushy coulees of the South Saskatchewan River, north of Swift Current, but rare elsewhere in the Elbow region (Roy, 1964). A colony of six Lark Sparrows was noted ten miles southeast of Saskatoon during the May Day Count of May, 1958 (Roy, 1958). The furthest north occurrence is for Prince Albert, where O. C. Furniss noted two birds on June 1, 1939, and a single bird, June 1, 1940 (Houston and Street, 1959).

A recent inquiry directed to the Prairie Nest Records Scheme has produced further interesting information. A site west of Gibbs along Last Mountain Lake has had a Lark Sparrow nest in 1961, 1963 and 1964. Most striking is a record for June 20, 1960, of a nest five miles south of Battleford, reported by Spencer Sealy. In Manitoba there are recent nest record cards from Oak Lake (July 12, 1960) and Charleswood (May 22, 1961). These scattered records to the east and north are unusual, and I have always regarded the Lark Sparrow as

a bird only likely to be found nesting in the more southerly regions of the province, and, at best, only a straggler in the more northern areas. It came, then, as a great surprise to flush a Lark Sparrow accidentally from an almost completed nest about one mile from the Nipawin town limits (near the eastern boundary of SW 3-51-14 w2). This area consists mainly of pure stands of jack pine, up to 50 feet high, interspersed with widely separated narrow strips of badly over-grazed pastureland. The soil is very light and sandy, and is sown mainly to brome and alfalfa. This nest was not too well concealed, at the base of a chopped-off alder shrub. Unfortunately, the nest was apparently immediately abandoned, despite not being touched in any manner, nor even approached again, for nearly a week.

The following day, June 13, 1964, I again visited this general area, to find still another pair of Lark Sparrows, some 100 yards distant from the first pair, feeding at least three young. These fledglings were high up in the branches of the jack pines, and from time to time flew, in a fluttering manner, from tree to tree, where they were fed by the parents. The food appeared to consist mainly of a small brown moth that abounded in the open field nearby.

Late in the evening of June 16, a half a mile west of the first two pair, a male Lark Sparrow sang intermittently for over 30 minutes from the tip of a 50 foot jack pine. The following day two Lark Sparrows were observed in a small nearby field. These were evidently a breeding pair. On the afternoon of June 24, Dr. S. D. Riome and the writer managed to locate this latter pair and succeeded in finding the nest, which contained two eggs and one young. Two days later, kodachromes were taken of the nest which contained one egg and two young. This nest was located some 75 feet from the edge of the jack pine woods, at the base of a clump of withered alfalfa. The field here was extremely dry and parched. The nest itself was marvellously constructed, almost entirely of baler twine, a num-



Conversion from kodachrome by M. G. Street  
Nest of Lark Sparrow, June 26, 1964

ber of short lengths, and one of over 42 inches.

On July 3, Dr. Riome noted a pair of Lark Sparrows on the north side of the Saskatchewan River, on the NW 30-50-14 w2, across the river opposite the Nipawin Union Hospital. This pair showed much agitation and after a short period of observation we flushed a fledgling, barely able to fly, from shrubbery near an old abandoned farm site. A small pasture field close by had been ploughed only a day or two before. This had likely been the nesting area. Two young were noted here the following evening.

This brings the Nipawin species list to 242, and increases the number of breeding species to 143. (The Osprey is the other breeding species added since publication of *Birds of the Saskatchewan River* in 1959.)

#### LITERATURE CITED

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- Roy, J. F. (compiler). 1958. Second Annual May Day Count, Saskatoon Natural History Society, *Blue Jay* 16:108.
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## APPARENT NESTING OF BONAPARTE'S GULL

Mr. Beverly J. Rose, biologist with the Wildlife Management Institute, Bismarck, North Dakota, reports seeing two Bonaparte's Gulls which behaved as a breeding pair, near Highway 35, west of Greenwater Provincial Park. This was on June 24, 1964, about one-half mile south of the McKague turnoff. A bird in bright plumage, assumed to be the male, was sitting on the roadbank, while the female was swimming nearby in a small pond bordered by cattails and near a wood. Mr. Rose studied the pair for several minutes and was able to take some color photographs. The Bonaparte's Gull has been reported nesting in only a few localities south of the boreal forest, hence this observation is worth noting. Ronald and Donald Hooper found it an occasional summer resi-

dent at Piwei Lakes, 40 miles to the southeast (1954. A preliminary list of the birds of the Somme district, Saskatchewan. Cont. No. 3, Yorkton Nat. Hist. Soc., 13 pp., mimeo), and some were identified by members of the Society at the Field Meeting at Greenwater Lake, June 17-19, 1960 (*Blue Jay*, 18:148). Maurice Street considers this species a rare summer resident at Nipawin (Houston and Street, 1959. The birds of the Saskatchewan River, Carlton to Cumberland. Spec. Pub. No. 2, S.N.H.S.). It has also been found nesting north of North Battleford at "Lamotte's Swamp" (*Blue Jay*, 14:80).—Ed.

## LARK BUNTING INFORMATION WANTED

In spite of what we said in the *Newsletter* (No. 8), a Tisdale record of the Lark Bunting as reported in *Blue Jay* "Chatter" (Sept., 1964) has been located. Gary Anweiler and Ralph D. Carson recorded a male Lark Bunting eight miles north of Tisdale on May 20, 1964. We are anxious to document the recent widespread occurrence of this arid plains bird and would welcome additional reports of its occurrence for any year. Our recent pleas have brought several letters; of special interest are reports from Dewberry, Alberta (60 miles northwest of Lloydminster), and Kinloch (22 miles northeast of Kelvington). It should be pointed out that this species has been recorded in the past as far north as Nipawin and Torch River, but we are especially interested in breeding records for the past few years. We hope to prepare a full report at a later time. —Ed.

## CORRECTIONS

### CO-OPERATIVE SPRING MIGRATION STUDY, 1964

Several incorrect dates were given for Regina because dates previous to April 1 were inadvertently missed in transcribing from records kept for the *Audubon Field Notes* Spring Migration period, April 1-May 31. The following corrections should be made:

- Pintail. March 31 (not April 1).  
Marsh Hawk. March 14 (not April 3).  
Common Crow. March 22 (not April 4).  
Baltimore Oriole. May 13 (not May 11).

—Ed.