

place, the adult Mallard attempted to protect her young from the loon's attack by rushing towards it and flapping her wings. However, her efforts were in vain as it was evident she was much smaller than the loon.

The first three ducklings did not reappear after going under. However, the last one, which had been the first in the line of escape, rose to the surface inverted, its feet frantically fanning the air until eventually no motion was evident. The loon remained close to the scene while another loon joined it. Both loons floated casually in the area while preening themselves as the dead young bird floated on the surface 2-3 feet away. The female Mallard made several passes as if in search of her young, eventually giving up and moving off to another part of the lake. There were no signs of young loons with the adults and there was no evidence to indicate that the loons had fed on the dead birds. Upon our departure the loons remained in the area of the attack.

There are other instances of loon killing birds. In Europe, Common Loons were seen eating young Common Doves.¹ In New Hampshire, a group of unmated loons attacked and killed loon chicks.² Candace Savage reports that the Common Loon diet, in addition to fish, also "includes crustaceans, amphibians, and, occasionally, the young of other water birds."³ In the Northwest Territories, an Arctic Loon had a furious attack on a Canada Goose defending its nest. The full length of the loon's bill entered the goose, puncturing its lung, and killing it.

¹JONES, R. N. and M. OBBARD. 1970. Canada Goose killed by Arctic Loon and subsequent pairing of its mate. *Auk* 87: 371.

²KLEIN, TOM. 1985. *Loon magic*. Falcon Press, Ashland, WI. 145 pp.

³SAVAGE, CANDACE. 1985. *The world of Canadian birds*. Western Producer Publications, Saskatoon, SK. 211 pp.

WINTERING HORNED LARKS IN SOUTH SASKATCHEWAN

MARTIN BAILEY, 3634 McCallum Avenue, Regina, Saskatchewan. S4S 0S5

The Big Muddy Christmas Bird Count was first undertaken in 1988; the Bromhead count is now in its 3rd year. While the topography of the two circles is different, the centers of these counts are less than 100 km from each other, and both are less than 30 km north of the 49th parallel.

The 1988 counts occurred on 28 December for Bromhead; and 29 December in the Big Muddy circle. The

weather in both areas was essentially the same. Both days were sunny with a little cloud. Temperatures ranged between -20° and -15° C under light conditions.

Golden Eagles, Snowy Owls, Partridges and Ring-necked Pheasants were observed in both areas. Sharp-tailed Grouse were conspicuous by their absence at both sites.



Horned Lark

Gary Seib

Of particular interest was the count of Horned Larks. Over 2000 individuals were noted in the Big Muddy circle. All were members of the paler prairie subspecies. On the other hand, in Bromhead 10 birds were counted, all members of the darker northern subspecies. Based on these limited observations an hypothesis might be proposed. Over the winter months prairie Horned Larks retreat to the more broken and sheltered areas afforded by the buttes and coulees of the Big Muddy. The northern subspecies is content to head south of their summer range, settling for the winter on the open flats of the Saskatchewan prairie that typifies the Bromhead circle.

Comments on these observations by other observers would be appreciated.

Editor's note: While it is tempting to try identifying subspecies in the field, it is usually successful. In the case of Horned Larks, Godfrey lists three races that breed in Saskatchewan and the Arctic but gives no descriptions of plum-

ages.¹ Scott illustrates five subspecies, only one of which breeds (occurs?) in Saskatchewan (enthymia).³ Peterson has oversimplified the situation by illustrating two forms, "northern" and "prairie" which actually include other subspecies from the east.² In addition, there are subtle plumage differences in age and sex. Because "light" and "dark" will vary from observer to observer, it is more important to pay attention to throat, forehead and eyeline colours. However, while differences in plumage may be evident, interpretation of the origins of the birds may not be practical.

¹GODFREY, W. E. 1986. The birds of Canada. National Mus. of Canada, Ottawa. 595 pp.

²PETERSON, R. T. 1980. A field guide to the birds east of the Rockies. Houghton Mifflin, Boston. 384 pp.

³SCOTT, S. L. 1987. Field guide to the birds of North America. National Geog. Soc., Washington. 464 pp.