

McCown's Longspur
16 Dec 1989
near DeSoto N.W.R, Harrison Co., IA
David Starr
IBL 60:47, 61:86

Record Number: 89-59
Classification: NA

DOCUMENTATION

David Starr (2 forms)

REFERENCES

Field Reports: IBL 60:47

Records Committee: IBL 61:86

VOTE: 3 A-D, 4 NA

NA: Document is good, but does not describe tail pattern. Black Tee must be seen to eliminate other longspurs.

NA: With no information on the duration of observations, previous observer experience with this species, time notes were taken, etc., it is very difficult to evaluate this documentation. Certainly the description could fit a McCown's Longspur. Presumably this was a winter male because of the "black and white scale pattern in its breast". It seemed odd that the rows of black dots on the back could be counted but no notice was taken of the tail, a very key feature.

Lack of any discussion as to how the wide range of possible Lapland Longspur plumages were eliminated leads me to have a reasonable doubt.

A-D: An enigma. Based on what little published info. I have, there appears to be little precedent for vagrancy into Iowa, but this is a species that could easily be missed. I first tried to make this into a Vesper Sparrow, but eliminated that due to the black and white scale pattern on the breast. In going through the NGS guide, looking for other similar looking and behaving species, the choices were narrowed to Lapland Longspur. This species does have rufous on the wings, but not on the greater wing coverts as described by the observer. While more subjective, description of the head color as "buffy" supports the ID. Also subjective but supportive, Zimmer (WESTERN BIRD WATCHER, 1985) describes the bill of McCown's as pink or pale, while those of other longspurs are darker. This documentation leaves something to be desired, as do most. David, it would have been helpful if you had completed the form (similar species discussion, how long before filled out, etc). Regardless, description seemed to eliminate other species. The fact that this species was out of range and season is a head scratcher, but stranger things have happened.

NA: All field marks noted could be, in fact seem to be, pointed to a winter plumaged male Lapland Longspur. The tail pattern a critical point in longspur identification is not mentioned further complicating this ID.

A-D: Description of the bird is very convincing. Tail not described and other similar species not mentioned or no discussion as to how they were eliminated. I think that points should have been raised, especially on such a rare species as this in Iowa. Description fairly cursory, but appears to have

eliminated any other similar species and gives an adequate enough description to make this a McCown's Longspur. This would be a likely location for this species to show up in Iowa. How long was this bird seen? For a very few seconds or for a longer period of time. I would like to know, it might have an impact on my vote as it stands now.

A-D: Good description of key field marks. It would have been nice if the tail pattern could have been observed in flight for one more additional field mark. A great find!

NA: Description seems adequate to ID, but two problems - description is bookish, and observer lacks experience (or at least states no experience with species). More information on sighting (other species present? Was this bird alone?) would have been welcome. Winter male not greatly different from winter male Lapland Longspur. No info on presence/absence of flank streaks (although this bird had "sides dingy cream").

89-59

(PLEASE PRINT OR TYPE)

SUPPORTING DETAILS: UNCOMMON OR RARE SPECIES/HIGH NUMBERS

CBC Name PeSoto Nat'l Wildl. Area Date Dec. 16, 1989 Compiler David Starr
 Observer writing this account & date David Starr Dec. 16, 1989

SPECIES McCown's Longspur NUMBER, AGE, SEX 1 ♂
 Distance from bird(s) 13 yards Relative size of bird 5-6 inches

HEAD & NECK (Describe forehead, crown, auricular, malar region, median line, etc.) Head was a light buffy color, check patch was a tan color starting from the middle of the eye to the lower mandible

EYE & LORES (Describe supercilium, ring, stripe, color, etc.)

Eyes were black, the supercilium started the middle of eye extending into check patch

UPPER & LOWER MANDIBLES mandibles were pink

LEGS & FEET bird was sitting on black dirt clod

UPPERPARTS (Describe nape, back, rump, upper tail coverts, etc.)

Nape was a buffy tan with 5 rows of black dots, back was a buffy white with dark brown scaled pattern rows

UNDERPARTS (Describe throat, belly, side, flanks, crissum, etc.)

Throat was white, belly was buffy white, sides were buffy cream, this bird had the black and white scale pattern on its breast. "Real nestisible"

RECTRICES (Describe inner, middle, outer tail feathers, color pattern, shape, etc.) Did not see tail due to the fact that the bird was facing right at me.

WING (Describe color, length, shape, linings, bars, coverts, leading & trailing edges, etc.) wing had a small patch of rust color on the median wing coverts with no wing bars

VOCALIZATION Heard none

BEHAVIOR Was in tilled corn field pecking at the ground

Date of observation Dec. 16, 1989 Time 3:40 Weather 20° - 7° Sky cloudy

Duration of observation 2 min. Bird - Sun orientation

Exact location Just north of railroad on ^{East side of road} K-16 (mud portion) north of Hwy - 30

Habitat _____ Other observers None

Optical equipment 7x26 Bushnell Binoculars

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS _____

AN ACCOMPANYING SKETCH OR PHOTOGRAPH CAN BE MOST HELPFUL

What species? McCown's Longspur How many? 1Location? North of railroad tracks on L-16, north of hwy. 30 (by Osoto Refuge)Type of Habitat? Tilled cornfieldWhen? date(s): 12/16/89 time: 3:40 to _____Who? your name and address: David Starr, Rt. 5, Box 64-G, Council Bluffs, IA 51503Others with you: noneOthers before or after you: none

Describe the bird(s) including only what you observed. Include size, shape, details of all parts (bill, eye, head, neck, back, wing, tail, throat, breast, belly, undertail, legs, feet). Also mention voice and behavior.

In a tilled cornfield pecking at the ground. No vocalization.

Head & Neck: head was light buffy color, check patch was a square with a tan color starting from the middle of the eye to the lower mandible.

Eyes: were black, the supercilium started from the middle of the eye extending into the check patch.

Mandibles: were pink

Upperparts: Wing was a buffy tan w/ 5 rows of black dots, back was a buffy white with dark brown scaled patterned rows.

Underparts: throat was white, belly was buffy white, sides were buffy cream. This bird had the black and white scale pattern on its breast, real noticeable.

Wings: had small patch of rust color on the median wing coverts with no wing bars.

Similar species; how eliminated:

Did any one disagree or have reservations about the identification? NO

If yes, explain:

Viewing conditions: give lighting, distance (how measured), optical equipment.

~~clear~~ Partly cloudy, 13 yards away, 7x26 Bushnell Binoculars.

Previous experience with species and similar ones:

References and persons consulted before writing description:

How long before field notes made? _____ this form completed? _____

Send completed form to Field Reports or CBC editor (address on back cover of Iowa Bird Life).