

Records Committee, Iowa Ornithologists' Union

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Burrowing Owl

30 Aug 1998

e. of Larchwood, Lyon Co., IA

Douglas C. Harr

photo only; P-0611, IBL 69:36, Harr 1999

Record Number: 98-35

Classification: A-P

PHOTOGRAPH

Douglas C. Harr, P-0611 [2/28/99]

REFERENCES

Field Reports: IBL 69:36

Records Committee: IBL 69:70

Harr, D. 1999. Burrowing Owl nest in Lyon County. Iowa Bird
Life 69:76-77.

VOTE: 7 A-P

A-P, No doubt.



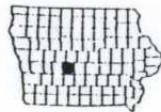
Burrowing Owl 78-35 P-0611
e. of Larchwood, Lyon Co., IA
30 Aug 1998 Douglas C. Harr

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AN IOWA WINTER MARSH WREN

JIM SINCLAIR

On 21 December 1997, Rick Trieff and I were birding the Brenton Slough area in northeastern Dallas County as part of the 1997 Saylorville Christmas Bird Count. At about 8 a.m., while searching a large cattail marsh, I heard the call note of a Marsh Wren. Despite insecure ice conditions, we spent the next 20 minutes attempting to approach the bird to confirm our initial identification.



In spite of our determined effort, the bird remained elusive and gave us only momentary glimpses. However, the distinctive call note was heard at least six times. What was seen was a small bird with a predominantly dark brown head, mantle, and tail. The breast and throat were white, and the flanks were a lighter brown than the mantle. One quick look at the sitting bird confirmed a wren-like posture including its tail cocked almost straight up.

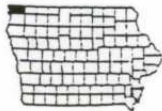
Prior to 1997, Marsh Wrens had been found three times in Iowa during winter. All three of the reports were from Christmas Bird Counts (Kent and Dinsmore, *Birds in Iowa*, 1996). Besides this account, one other Marsh Wren record was submitted for the 1997 Christmas Bird Count season (S. Dinsmore, *Iowa Bird Life* 68:42-54, 1998). It is my belief that persistent efforts by Christmas Bird Count participants in the proper habitat will be rewarded with winter records of Marsh Wrens on a regular basis.

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BURROWING OWL NEST IN LYON COUNTY

DOUG HARR

On Sunday, 30 August 1998, I received a call from Dolly Zangger, a fellow birder from Larchwood. She reported observing a Burrowing Owl at a probable nest site three miles east of Larchwood. Having trouble locating the site on my first attempt, I got fresh instructions from Dolly and was able to find the owl.



I encountered a single owl in apparent juvenal plumage, perched on a fence post between the county road and an adjacent cornfield. As is typical with Burrowing Owls, the individual showed little fear and continued perching while I observed it and took several photos from the car window. Although not obvious in the photos, with binoculars the remains of a few pinfeathers could be observed on the bird's crown, nape, and back, indicating it was a young-of-the-year. I saw no evidence of other owls on this or subsequent visits. Dolly Zangger, however, reports that while she never saw more than one bird on her several visits to the site, she observed what she was certain was an adult owl on one visit. The birds apparently vacated the site about a week after the first observations and were not seen again. According to *The Iowa Breeding Bird Atlas* (Jackson et al., Univ. Iowa Press, 1996), nest dispersal usually occurs in early September, and this time period coincides with our observations at the Larchwood site.

98-35

A nest burrow was prominent in the road ditch immediately beneath the post on which the owl was perched. It appeared to have been an old badger den in the embankment on the field side of the road ditch. This site surprised me a bit, as there was little suitable owl habitat in the immediate vicinity, save for the ditch itself. However, I have observed similar roadside owl nests in the eastern Dakotas, so such an occurrence is not unprecedented.

Birds in Iowa (Kent and Dinsmore, 1996) indicates previous observations of Burrowing Owls in Lyon County, but no nest records. Our confirmation of a local nest expands the owl's nesting range in northwestern Iowa to all counties bordering the Big Sioux and upper Missouri rivers. Burrowing Owls normally range throughout the western half of the United States and probably once were relatively common in the prairies of northwestern Iowa. Although apparently declining in eastern portions of their range, the species still shows up every few years somewhere in western Iowa.

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SMITH'S LONGSPURS IN KOSSUTH COUNTY, 1998

MATTHEW C. KENNE

Smith's Longspurs were found in Kossuth County in October 1998, the first documented sighting of their fall migration in Iowa in more than 70 years. Described as rare migrants in western Minnesota and rare spring migrants in Iowa, Smith's Longspurs are also erratic, secretive, and frequent habitat that usually offers little to entice birders in mid-April and mid-October. I hope my encounters reported here encourage others to widen their search for Smith's Longspurs, enjoying the thrill of discovery while giving us a more accurate measure of their occurrence in the state. For me, Smith's Longspurs are diamonds in the rough, and well worth the effort.



Maynard Reece Waterfowl Production Area consists of 300 acres of gently rolling former cropland dotted with restored wetland basins. Half of the area was planted in native grasses in 1997, but in the spring of 1998, the other half was still soybean stubble. Recalling their regular locations in Johnson and Louisa counties, the area seemed like great habitat for Smith's Longspurs. I searched the area several times in early April for Smith's, but without success. On 24 April, when I checked for shorebirds, I could see swirling flocks of small birds over a distant rise. I was eventually able to stalk into the middle of about 100 Smith's Longspurs as they chased each other around. When chasing, they often gave a buzzy call note I'd not heard before in addition to the regular "tic-tic-tic" in flight. The molt appeared complete by the end of April, with the black-and-white head pattern of breeding plumage males visible on some birds.

By the fall of 1998, the habitat at Maynard Reece W.P.A. had changed somewhat but still looked very promising. Newly planted native grasses had one season of growth and the widespread pigweed had been mowed, sprayed, and mowed again, leaving sparse ankle-high cover. As I stopped to check shorebirds on 7 October, the possibility of finding Smith's Longspurs was on my mind. It was a couple of weeks early, but there had been a report from the Twin Cities earlier in the week. I flushed several American Pipits and many Savannah Sparrows around the pools, but was still surprised when a Smith's Longspur flew up, calling repeatedly. It circled around