

## DOCUMENTATION OF SIGNIFICANT BIRD SIGHTING

Smith's Longspur      2 or 3 birds                      October 7, 1998  
Maynard Reese WPA, Kossuth Co.      SW of north side parking  
Open area sparsely covered with grass (1 season restored  
prairie and mowed Pigweed) surrounding wetland potholes

It was approx. 8 A.M., and I was specifically searching for Smith's Longspurs as I weaved around potholes. I actually thought I was a week or so early, but there had already been a report from the Twin Cities. I had flushed many Savannah Sparrows and several small groups of American Pipits, when a single bird flew up calling the "tic-tic-tic" of a longspur. It was similar in size to the pipits and larger than the Savannahs. It had white outer tail feathers like the pipits, but was otherwise quite different: it was stockier (making the tail seem shorter), the bill was short and thick, unlike the longish thin bill of the pipits, and it was plain buff underneath from throat to undertail, lacking the bunched streaking on the upper breast that was visible on the pipits when they flew by. I wasn't able to see any distinct white on the lesser wing coverts that would indicate a male.

The bird circled around several times, calling all the while, and finally landed a short distance away. As I slowly approached the landing spot, 2 longspurs flew up. They flew around together calling, but I was only able to see the same general markings and proportions as before. The birds landed again rather close by after circling, and again I tried to approach to get views of them standing. Unfortunately, they flushed before I spotted them, circled around (calling again), and flew across the largest body of water, disappearing to the SW.

About an hour later (approx. 9 A.M.), when I was coming back from having walked over much of the east half of Maynard Reese, I flushed a Smith's Longspur less than 50 yds. from where I found them earlier. This bird didn't circle, but flew "ticcing" away.

American Pipits were eliminated by their totally different voice, the pattern of the underparts, and bill & tail proportions. Lapland Longspurs have obvious white (not buff) underneath which would have been especially visible on several close flybys and passes overhead. Male Laplands should show some black streaking on the upper chest in sharp contrast with the white below. There wasn't any chestnut visible on the nape or upper wing. Although I don't have enough experience with Smith's to say I heard any difference in the sound of the "tics", I didn't hear any of the "tew"

notes that Laplands (but not Smith's) mix in with their tic-tic-tics. Any regular sparrow that is not eliminated by white outer tail feathers is eliminated by the unique longspur calls. The buffy/tan color underneath and the calls also rule out Horned Lark.

No one was with me, and no one saw the birds after me. Weather: cloudy, 50 deg., 10-20 mph. wind n-nw, 8x binocs, closest approaches (flybys): 10 yds. estimated

I see Lapland Longspur flocks yearly, but I have only 3 previous sightings of Smith's. The most recent was of a flock of 100 at Maynard Reese on April 24, 1998.

I made no notes in the field, but finished this account 5 hours later without referring to any outside information.

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