



SMITH'S LONGSPUR
Calcarius pictus

April 6, 1990 18:30 to 19:05

2 mi. NNW of Lone Tree, Johnson Co., Iowa

In large hay stubble field with scattered bales, the longspurs were abundant, though mostly hidden in the stubble. A few were constantly calling overhead and landing on nearby roads or plowed fields. Estimating their numbers was difficult but there must have been a few hundred in all. I identified them first overhead with all-white outer rectrices and distinctly buffy underparts. Close looks were difficult owing to the birds' timidity and the freezing wind. My first close look was of a female in the road. Non-descript really, eye-ringed, suggestive of a Vesper Sparrow but for entirely buff underparts. I saw 3-4 males from as close as 100'. Facial pattern was evident but not as distinct as would be expected in high-breeding plumage. A white shoulder patch was distinctive. Underparts entirely rich buff. Outer rectrices white. Legs pink. call a distinctive 3-note rattle (tick-tick-tick) given overhead. Also seen were a Red Fox and an alternate-plumaged male Lapland Longspur. Observed 35-40 min. in late afternoon under clear skies with Zeiss 10 x 40 binoculars.

-- Randy Pinkston (over)