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THE LARK BUNTING IN CALIFORNIA

On 28 and 29 April 1970 we (SRW and WDC) observed 14 Lark Buntings *Calamospiza melanocorys*, including 6 males, in overgrazed grassland of Yokohl Valley, approximately ten miles southeast of Exeter, Tulare County. Grinnell and Miller (Pacific Coast Avifauna no. 27, 1944) consider it an irregular winter visitor to southern California, and cite only two records to the north of the Tehachapi Mountains in the Central Valley (Dudley, Mariposa County, and Tulare Lake, Kings County). A check of the literature reveals three additional records of single birds for the Central Valley.

Grinnell and Miller (op. cit.) give seventeen records (one of a flock of 30 birds) from Los Angeles southward in the area west of the coastal ranges. A check of the San Diego Natural History Museum reveals six unpublished specimen records from western San Diego County. In recent years the southern coast has produced nine records, and some of these involve more than one bird. To the north it has been recorded once each in Santa Barbara, Santa Cruz, and San Mateo Counties, four times in Marin County, and twice on the Farallon Islands. Most of the early records for the coastal area are for the spring period (April and May), but most recent records are for the fall.

There appears to be confusion about the status of the Lark Bunting in southeastern California. Grinnell and Miller (op. cit.) indicate it is most numerous in this area of California, being common at times. This statement is based on the facts that Grinnell (Univ. Calif. Publ. Zool. no. 12, 1914) found a flock of 12 south of Needles in 1910, Hoffmann (Condor 24:101, 1922 and 25:107, 1923) found a flock of 30 near Banning and two flocks of 20 in the Cochella and Imperial Valleys in 1922 and 1923, Hanna (Condor 42:265, 1940) found it "abundant" between Amboy and Ludlow in San Bernardino County on 3 March 1940, and that there were four other records, involving a total of 10 birds, from San Bernardino, Riverside and Imperial Counties. A check of specimens in the San Diego Natural History Museum reveals four unpublished specimen records from the same three counties. The A.O.U. (Check-list of North American Birds, 1957) includes southern California in the regular winter range (probably based on the statements of Grinnell and Miller), and this is repeated by Peterson (A Field Guide to Western Birds, 1961). The true status of the species appears to have been that of a rare and irregular visitor. More recently, Monson (Audubon Field Notes 6:33, 210 and 263, 1952) observed numbers in extreme eastern San Bernardino County between 18 October 1951 and 26 April 1952 (peak numbers of 350 on 19 December and 450 on 24 February), there is a record of 5 in extreme eastern San Diego County, and there are seven records of single birds scattered from Mono County southward. This is consistent with the situation in Arizona where Phillips et al. (The Birds of Arizona, 1964) indicate it is scarce and irregular in the west, but common there some years, and that it usually reaches the Colorado River only in fall.

In California the majority of the records are for the fall period; however, there are a number of spring records, and many of the earlier records were for this time of the year. In the south there are records for the winter period, and some of these involve flocks. It would appear the Lark Bunting has never occurred regularly in California, though there have been winters during which flocks reached as far west as the southern portion of the State. At present it continues to be a rare stray to

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southern California, where small flocks are still recorded sporadically, and it has occurred casually north to Marin, Colusa, and Mono Counties.



Figure 1. A map showing the distribution of records of the Lark Bunting in California. Records prior to 1944 are indicated by an open circle, and more recent records are indicated by a solid circle. The areas of greatest density are the population centers of Los Angeles and San Diego.

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APPENDIX

A summary of recent records follows, and all are taken from Audubon Field Notes (A.F.N.). The data on the unpublished specimen records are also included, and are the records followed by a single number, the San Diego Natural History Museum catalogue number. All the records are arranged by regions, and are listed with the northernmost first.

Central Valley: 1 Colusa, Colusa Co. 3 April 1953 (A.F.N. 7:290, 1953); 1 Sutter Buttes, Sutter Co. 27 Nov. 1965 (A.F.N. 20:90, 1966); 1 nr. Taft, Kern Co. 13 Oct. 1968 (A.F.N. 23:112, 1969).

Coastal: 1 Point Reyes, Marin Co. 28 Sept. 1963, 13 Sept. 1964, 12 Sept. 1965, and 10 Sept. 1967 (A.F.N. 19:76, 1965; 20:90, 1966; 22:88, 1968); 1 Farallon Islands, 10-24 Sept. 1969, and 9 Sept. 1970 (A.F.N. in press); 1 Aptos, Santa Cruz Co. 22 April 1968 (A.F.N. 22:574, 1968); 1 Pigeon Point, San Mateo Co. 15 May 1968 (A.F.N. 22:574, 1968); 1 Whittier, Los Angeles Co. 28 July 1953 (A.F.N. 8:43, 1954); 1 Dana Point, Orange Co. 1 Sept. 1968 (A.F.N. 23:112, 1969); 1-5 Homoland, Riverside Co. Winter 1969-70, and 1 nr. Temecula, Riverside Co. 28 Feb. 1970 (A.F.N. 24:541, 1970); 1 La Purta Valley, San Diego Co. 13 Sept. 1913 (1851); 1 nr. Santee, San Diego Co. 26 Jan. 1921 (34128); 1 Lemon Grove, San Diego Co. 2 Nov. 1943 (18758); 1 each, San Diego, San Diego Co. 1 Nov. 1914, 8 May 1915, and 11 Feb. 1917 (34131, 34130, 34129); 1-3 Imperial Beach, San Diego Co. 3-19 Oct. 1963, 1 there 24 Nov. 1963, 3-10 there 10-19 April 1966, and 2 there 31 Oct. and 20 Dec. 1969 (A.F.N. 18:76, 1964; 20:547, 1966; 24:100c and 541, 1970).



Figure 2. Part of a flock of Lark Buntings near Exeter, Tulare County, on 29 April 1970. *Photo by Dean Carrier.*

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Southeastern: 1 Oasis, Mono Co. 5 Sept. 1970 (A.F.N. in press); 1 Deep Springs, Inyo Co. 30 Aug. 1966 (A.F.N. 21:80, 1967); 1 Furnace Creek Ranch, Inyo Co. 14-15 Nov. 1970 (A.F.N. in press); 1 nr. Victorville, San Bernardino Co. 14 May 1884 (1223); 1 nr. Vidal Junction, San Bernardino Co. 6 Nov. 1952 (A.F.N. 7:31, 1953); 1 nr. Desert Center, Riverside Co. 23 March 1968 (A.F.N. 22:480, 1968); 1 San Gorgonio Pass, Riverside Co. 6 April 1885 (1228); 5 nr. Scissors Crossing, San Diego Co. 28 April 1968 (A.F.N. 22:577, 1968); 1 Salton Sea, Imperial Co. 15 Feb. 1940 (27934); 1 Calipatria, Imperial Co. 16 Feb. 1938 (27935); 1 nr. Bard, Imperial Co. 19 Oct. 1970 (A.F.N. in press); 1 nr. Holtville, Imperial Co. 26 Oct. 1969 (A.F.N. 24:100c, 1970).

A record of two flocks in San Benito County in 1968 (A.F.N. 22:574, 1968) is unconvincing, and was obtained through second hand sources. *Sanford R. Wilbur, U. S. Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife, Patuxent Wildlife Research Center, Ojai, California, W. Dean Carrier, U. S. Forest Service, Los Padres National Forest, Ojai, California, and Guy McCaskie, San Diego Natural History Museum, Balboa Park, San Diego, California.*