

AN UNUSUAL MORTALITY AMONG MIGRATING LAPLAND  
LONGSPURS IN NORTHWESTERN NEBRASKA

During the afternoon and evening of Sunday, February 19, 1922, large flocks of the western form of the Lapland Longspur, known as the Alaskan Longspur (*Calcarius lapponicus alascensis* Ridgway), descended into the White River valley of Dawes county in northwestern Nebraska. A few Horned Larks, probably *Otocoris alpestris enthyimia* Oberholser, were also present in the flocks. Evidently the flight represented a great wave of northward migration. As evening came on a severe snowstorm developed, and the temperature dropped precipitately. The large flocks of these birds were observed flying low and confusedly in and about the towns of Chadron, Whitney and Crawford, in Dawes county, so that the air seemed filled with them. After nightfall the lights of the town and in windows of houses added further to the confusion of the birds.

On the following Monday morning large numbers of the Longspurs and a smaller number of the Horned Larks were found dead in various parts of these towns. At Chadron most of the birds were killed within a block of the intersection of the two main streets of the town where the lights seemed to have blinded them. Without doubt many of them were killed or maimed by flying against wires, the branches of trees, lighted windows, and buildings, in the towns, where they were found the next morning on the streets, sidewalks and lawns. But many died and were found lying on the ground in open places with no buildings near. The same flight that visited Dawes county extended west at least to Harrison, Sioux county, and east to Gordon, Sheridan county, where a similar heavy mortality occurred during the night of February 19.

Invariably the birds picked up and examined on Monday morning had their crops and stomachs entirely empty, indicating that the storm conditions or other cause had prevented any feeding for several hours before they descended into the region above mentioned. Had they just completed a long and wearisome diurnal migration? With little question they were hungry and exhausted so that they were unable to withstand the shock of the storm which descended upon them, many of them died of exposure during the night, aside from those dying as a result of collisions in their confused flying about.

On the night of Monday, February 27, 1922, much the same sort of catastrophe occurred at Spalding, Greeley county, near the eastern edge of the sandhills. The birds reached that locality in large flocks during the night, encountered a cold wave there, and on Tuesday morning their bodies were to be found by the thousands strewn along the streets and over the countryside adjoining. As in the case just described in northwestern Nebraska, the dead birds found in Greeley county showed clearly that they had had no food for some time before their death, and some were even emaciated. Some that were not dead, but practically helpless, when gathered up and brought into the warm of buildings, and provided with food and water, quickly revived, and when released flew strongly away. The Longspurs in the Greeley county flight were of the eastern form, the typical Lapland Longspur (*Calcarius lapponicus lapponicus* Linnaeus).

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#### A REAL SYCAMORE WARBLER

On June 22, 1918, I was standing on the bridge over the Big Barren River, three miles north of town, watching for any birds that might appear along the river. Near the end of the bridge stands a large sycamore tree. Because of the height of the bridge my eyes were on a level with the upper limbs of the tree. Suddenly a Sycamore Warbler darted in among the leaves and I heard the chatter of young birds still in the nest. As the place was inaccessible, either with glasses or by climbing, I gave the matter no more thought and had so far forgotten it that I failed to look for the nest when the leaves had fallen.

On April 19, 1919, I was again standing on the bridge when I happened to think of the experience of the year before. While I was telling some friends about it, we saw a Sycamore Warbler fly to the same place, seize some of the material of the old nest, which was now plainly visible, and fly with it to a much lower limb on the opposite side of the tree. Here we soon made out a nest in process of construction.

On April 8, 1920, I visited the place again and a Sycamore Warbler was building a nest on another limb, nearly on a level with the nest of 1918. I often visited the place in 1921, but failed to see either the bird or a nest. In all my experience as a bird student these are the only nests of this species that I have discovered, even though I have seen the bird in small numbers every summer.

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#### NESTING OF THE BELL VIREO

The Bell Vireo has been known at Red Cloud, Nebraska, for several years, but in 1920 we were favored with a study of the nesting bird for the first time. About July 10, 1920, one of my friends who is interested in birds and has a large garden with many fruit trees, told me of a bird that was new to him nesting in his lilac bush ten rods from the house. It was about two and one-half feet from the ground and near the outer edge on the south side, half covered by overhanging leaves and yet quite in sight. Four of us pushed aside the leaves and gazed at the tiny bird to our heart's content. She seemed to think, as her eyes twinkled, "I can see you all right but you cannot see me." I could not bear to put her off the nest for fear of injury or fright, so came again a few days later, with the same result. Saturday, July 17, I had to leave for over Sunday and feared the eggs would hatch in my absence, which they did, so I went with metric rule to take observations on nest and eggs. To my surprise, as soon as I neared the nest the bird flew off, quite nervous. As I wished first to study the line over the eye and a few other points, I