

## THE CHESTNUT-COLLARED LONGSPUR IN COLORADO

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The rolling prairies extending to the eastward of the continental divide are the wintering grounds of flocks of small passerine birds; Desert Horned Larks (*Otocoris a. leucolaema*) occur in great flocks in the northeastern portion of the state, and occasionally smaller groups of McCown's Longspurs (*Rhynchophanes mccowni*) are found nearby, or mixed with the more abundant horned larks. The Chestnut-collared Longspur (*Calcarius ornatus*) is not common in winter, if we may judge from our limited observations and from the number of specimens in our collection. Sclater (1912) lists various winter records, but we have only three specimens, all taken at Barr, Adams County, Colorado, in December, 1909. Although the Chestnut-collared Longspur has been found nesting in states adjacent to Colorado, it has not been recorded breeding here, so far as we have been able to find.

In the spring of 1932, Captain L. R. Wolfe stopped at The Colorado Museum of Natural History, and mentioned that he had seen Chestnut-collared Longspurs in a broad valley south of Cheyenne, Wyoming, just over the Colorado line. He believed them to be nesting and Mr. F. W. Miller visited the location and succeeded in finding nests and collecting several sets of eggs, which we have in the Museum collection.

During the past two seasons (1936 and 1937) we have visited the locality on several occasions and have found that the birds are numerous in this broad valley, where they were nesting with McCown's Longspurs, Lark Buntings, Desert Horned Larks, and Mountain Plovers as near neighbors. We made our first trip on August 8 and found the various prairie species assembled in flocks; they were exceedingly scarce except in the vicinity of a small waterhole and about a field of irrigated alfalfa, where hundreds of longspurs and horned larks were feeding upon insects. It was difficult to distinguish between the McCown and Chestnut-collared in flight and we found them extremely wild; we ran several miles each way from our little valley without finding Chestnut-collared Longspurs elsewhere, although McCown's Longspurs were common upon the level prairie adjacent. On September 5 we again visited the area and found birds still numerous about the waterhole where we had no difficulty in securing a few specimens in their fall plumage.

The summer of 1937 was well advanced before we had an opportunity to visit the breeding grounds on June 19. The prairie was covered with wild flowers—the prairie primrose, penstemon, and wall-

flowers making a natural garden; and black-breasted male Chestnut-collared Longspurs were dotted about the valley. They rested upon song perches or hovered in the air upon outstretched wings as they poured forth their satisfaction with the world in general, and then, at the conclusion of their songs, drifted downward to their weedstalks. It is strange how similar are the songs and antics of the males of various species of prairie birds during the spring. Even the nuptial flight of such unrelated birds as the Mountain Plover and longspurs are similar, although, of course, the songs themselves have nothing in common.

The song of the Chestnut-collared reminds us of that of the Western Meadowlark, and time and again we were deceived as we heard their clear calls. The nuptial flight of the males of the two longspurs differs somewhat; the McCown mounts high in the air, singing all the while, and then floats downward with outspread wings making a definite "V". The Chestnut-collared tends to circle more, dropping less abruptly, and they seem to quiver their wings as they descend to earth, their dark underparts black against the light blue of the sky.

It is an easy matter to locate nests of both species of longspurs after the song perches have been discovered, for the females are almost sure to be tucked away in the near vicinity, and it is only a matter of walking about until they flush from under foot. We found many nests of both species with contents ranging from fresh eggs to half-grown young, and imagined we could distinguish a choice of nesting sites in that the majority of those of the Chestnut-collared were in rolling country, on the slopes and along the valley floor, while the McCowns were more abundant on the level prairie. The McCowns were found adjacent to the Chestnut-collared, but the latter were not observed nesting on the flat areas. In other words, the flat expanses were typical nesting areas of the McCown's Longspurs and the valleys of the Chestnut-collared, but the former extended their nesting range into that of the latter. There was no place, however, where we could draw a line between nesting areas.

The nests of both species were cup-like affairs tucked in depressions excavated by the female, lined with grasses, hair, and feathers; they were usually concealed between some bit of prairie vegetation, and oftentimes were beautifully placed near prairie asters, phlox, or flowering cactus. Even when in the open, however, cut by only a few blades of wiry grass, they were difficult to see. They had from three to five eggs of various markings, no two sets that we found being alike.

Whenever we found a nest of Chestnut-collared young, the male was extremely solicitous. Frequently he would alight within a few



FIG. 35. Chestnut-collared Longspur.  
By the Authors.

feet of us, voicing protest, without losing the small insects which crammed his beak. We erected our photographic blinds to observe the birds better, and to secure our film record for our picture library. Hardly had we concealed ourselves until the male was back, chucking insects down coöperative young, but the female would not come to the nest, although she sat some distance away with food-filled beak. When only eggs were in the nest, however, conditions were reversed, for then it was the female that returned to the nest and the male remained in the distance. We worked with too few birds to generalize, however; it may have been that other individuals would have reacted differently. We found twelve nests of the Chestnut-collared Longspurs in the course of our ramblings over this isolated bit of Colorado prairie, and were glad of a chance to add a pictorial record of this species to our files of the nesting birds of our state.

## LITERATURE CITED

Slater, William L., A History of the Birds of Colorado. Witherby and Company, London, 1912.

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## NEST BUILDING BEHAVIOR IN THE LOGGERHEAD SHRIKE GROUP

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Statements concerning male Loggerhead Shrikes<sup>1</sup> (*Lanius ludovicianus*) aiding in nest building are placed by Miller<sup>2</sup> in the group of writings on life history which "yet are not founded on well proved facts". Without regard to whether or not such behavior is normal, this paper will attempt to show that one male Loggerhead assisted in nest building.

The incomplete nest of this bird and his mate was discovered in Woodbury Township, Stutsman County, North Dakota, on May 6, 1937, in a dead poplar tree hardly forty-five yards from a farmhouse. It rested about sixteen feet from the ground in an angle formed by the

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<sup>1</sup>This is a case to show the inadequacy of the vernacular names in the current A. O. U. Check-List. The author does not wish to distinguish between *Lanius ludovicianus migrans* and *L. l. excubitorides*. But there is no common term to include the two subspecies. Hence the term "Loggerhead" is here allowed to stand for the specific group.—Ed.

<sup>2</sup>Systematic revision and natural history of the American shrikes (*Lanius*). By Alden H. Miller. Univ. Calif. Publ. Zool., Vol. 38, No. 2, 1931, pp. 11-248, page 168.