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# **N. M. O. S. BULLETIN**

*incorporating the Newsletter of the  
New Mexico Ornithological Society*

Vol. 4, No. 1

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Las Cruces

## 1976 ANNUAL MEETING APRIL 10-11 SILVER CITY CALL FOR PAPERS

Because many members have urged us to schedule a meeting outside Albuquerque at a time when birding is good, this year's Annual Meeting will be held Saturday and Sunday, April 10-11, in Silver City. The attendance at this meeting will guide the Board in selecting future sites for Annual Meetings.

The program will start at 9:15 am, April 10, in Room 219 of the Science Building, on the Western New Mexico University campus. The Saturday sessions will be devoted to papers, discussions, and seminars. Two Sunday field trips are planned. John Hubbard will lead one group to Guadalupe Canyon, and there will be a trip to the lower Gila River, probably in the area of Redrock and Virden. Spring birds should be coming in then...Vermilion Flycatchers, orioles, kingbirds, and some spring migrants.

Under the terms of the new constitution, there are no elections of officers this year. Any resolutions or proposals calling for a vote at the meeting must be submitted to the Secretary or President by March 15. This notice also constitutes a call for papers for the meeting. Those wishing to present a paper please submit the title and kinds of illustrations to be used to Bruce Hayward (address on back) by March 15. Papers may not be longer than 15 minutes, and shorter ones are acceptable.

The following motels are available in Silver City. The rates are variable, but sample rates are given for each. Motels are arranged from cheapest to most expensive.

<i>Clark Motel</i>	538-3755	\$8.50single	\$12.00double\$12.00triple
<i>Silver Motel</i>	538-2438	10.40	14.00
<i>Holiday Motor Hotel</i>	538-3711	11.00	14.00
<i>Drifter Motel</i>	538-2916	11.00	15.00
<i>Copper Manor</i>	538-5392	12.00	15.00(cheapest double rate)

Camp grounds are available in Cherry Creek, 15 miles north of Silver City on NM 15. Undeveloped camp grounds are available along the Gila River on the road to Bill Evans Lake. These are about 30 miles from Silver City, but the early morning birding should be good there.

#### REPORT FROM THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS

The Board met four times between annual meetings; in April, July, September, and December. Minutes of these meetings are on file and available to anyone who wishes to read them. To summarize, business matters transacted included: Barbara C. McKnight was voted Honorary Life Membership; dues were increased to \$2.50 student, \$5.00 regular, and \$7.50 family; the Board voted to officially support the establishment of Natural Areas in New Mexico and to support the efforts of the Nature Conservancy in obtaining land for preservation, with Henry Zeller as our representative; John Hubbard was appointed Editor-in-charge for the revision of the *Checklist*, and later Bruce Hayward and Jim Travis agreed to work with him as a nucleus committee; a new format was established for the *Bulletin-Newsletter* with issues appearing approximately in February, April, September, and November and an additional one if the editor feels it necessary; bird-finding guides were formulated to appear as addenda to the *Field Notes* based on profiles of localities submitted by members.

In 1975 there were 125 members in the NMOS.

Mailed to the membership during the year were four *Bulletins* and two editions of *Field Notes*. Many requests for information and for publications were handled during the course of the year.

Respectfully submitted,  
(signed)  
Claudia L. Hubbard, Secretary

#### MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL MEETING, 1 MARCH 1975

The meeting opened at 9:15 am, in the Biology Building, University of New Mexico, Albuquerque, with a slide show presented by Bruce J. Hayward. At 9:35 am the meeting was officially called to order by President Hayward. There were no corrections or additions to the 1974 annual reports which had been mailed earlier. Treasurer James L. Sands reported a balance of \$874 as of January 1, 1975. Election of the slate proposed by the Nominating Committee - Bruce J. Hayward, President; Ralph J. Raitt, Vice President; Claudia L. Hubbard, Secretary; James L. Sands, Treasurer; James Travis, Director-at-large - was unanimous. President Hayward expressed his thanks to Barbara C. McKnight for the outstanding work she has done in the Society and the attending NMOS members applauded.

The Publications Committee reported most members prefer the *Field Notes*, then the *Newsletter*, *Annual Meeting*, and last, the *Field Trips*. There has been a problem with the cost of the newsletter, so members attending were polled to

discuss alternatives. Ro Wauer stepped down as editor and was applauded for his efforts. Bill Principe has agreed to assume the editorship.

Barbara McKnight moved not to officially sponsor a field trip but to have the NMOS make available all information concerning those that will be made during the spring. This motion was seconded and approved and it was requested that all groups within the state planning spring trips get their information in for publication and distribution by April 1.

Majorie Williams moved that Boyd McLeod be given an Honorary Membership; this motion was seconded and approved.

Henry Zeller has agreed to serve as Conservation Chairman. He is working within the NMOS framework and on his own and requested ideas be passed on to him for protection of habitats and natural areas be inventoried.

John Hubbard reported that the archives are now filed by year and requested any literature, photos, field notes, or tapes that verify occurrence of species within the state. If any members know of private collections or extensive personal field notes, please let him know. Any dead specimens picked up can be taken to UNM, NMSU, ENMU, or the Department of Game and Fish.

Ro Wauer reported on the Sunday field trip to Bosque del Apache, leaving at 6:00 am from the Biology Department door.

The morning program was occupied with a panel discussion; John Hubbard, J. David Ligon, and Ro Wauer showed slides and specimens and discussed shorebird identification. The specimens were available during lunch for closer examination.

Following the noon break, papers were given by: Charles A. Davis, "Bird populations in a shrub-grassland area of southeastern New Mexico"; Jorge Orejuela, "Natural history of motmots in the Yucutan Peninsula"; Gary Thomas, "Breeding behavior of Black-tailed Gnatcatchers"; James P. Griffing, "Mourning Doves in a shrub-grassland area of southeastern New Mexico"; Bill Principe, "The unchecked list of birds of New Mexico"; and Wayne R. Pilz, "Food habits of Swainson's Hawks on the Jornada del Muerte". Following the papers, there were reports given on the activities and aims of the Southeastern Audubon Society (by Marjorie Williams), the Sangre de Cristo Audubon Society (Mrs. Hartshorne), the Central Audubon Society (Mrs. Washburn), the Four Corners Bird Club (Donna Thatcher), and the Southwestern Audubon Society (Jim Stowe). The Annual Meeting was adjourned at 4:30 pm.

Ro Wauer narrated the evening film which was on the Big Bend area. He led the Sunday Field Trip which went to the Bosque del Apache National Wildlife Refuge.

Respectfully submitted,  
(signed)  
Claudia L. Hubbard, Secretary

#### ANNUAL CONSERVATION REPORT

Every year is a busy one for anybody who keeps his eyes open for threats to habitat for birds and other wildlife in the state. This year has been no exception, and the volume of work is such that one cannot do everything that ought to be done. I must add that, although the various threats are on the

negative side, there is also a positive aspect to conservation activity. On the negative side there were many projects, proposals, and questions needing action, but the most questionable ones, the final disposition of which is still not decided, were the Bureau of Reclamation's Operations and Maintenance Program for the Rio Grande, and the exotic species program of the New Mexico Department of Game and Fish.

The O&M Program was covered briefly in the winter issue of the *NMOS Bulletin*. It is probably too late in the long history of manmade alterations to the Rio to do much about its reaches above San Marcial, although the Bureau of Reclamation must be watched for a revival of the suspended plan for major "phreatophyte" clearing all along the river. But the area which badly needs our protection is that downstream of San Marcial as far south as South Monticello Point in the lower portion of Elephant Butte Reservoir. This reach of the river below San Marcial is that reserved for the Elephant Butte impoundment, which rarely ever fills up.

Through nature's reaction to the manipulation of the river by man, the upper reservoir area has become important habitat for birds and other wildlife, which would probably not be damaged unduly even in times of temporary high water. The Bureau proposes to clear much woody vegetation which they consider to be phreatophytes, but which is very attractive to bird species. We should do what we can to prevent the degradation of this interesting area.

The most questionable present phase of the Department of Game and Fish's exotic species program is their effort to find homes in the wild for the exotic ungulates which have been imported into the state for the purpose of establishing populations here and there for the benefit of hunters. Since the Bureau of Land Management, through the operation of the National Environmental Policy Act, has refused to permit the Department to release a herd of Siberian ibexes on the Sierra Ladrones, it appears unlikely that the release of exotics will be permitted on any Federal lands. Yet the Department has not given up, for it has a considerable number of animals of several species and is anxious to find places to put them. The latest proposal is to release some 24 Siberian ibexes on private land in the Canadian River canyon, while continuing to seek opportunities to dispose of the animals remaining on hand on Federal lands. Incidentally, I have learned that there is to be no effort to keep the released animals on private lands, according to the proposal, so they would, if release and establishment goes through, disperse all over the canyon, eventually encroaching on Federal lands.

The main question here is whether the risks are worth the benefits to a few lucky hunters, who may have to pay hundreds of dollars for a permit to shoot a fancy trophy animal. The disruptive effects of the injection of exotics can be widespread, and not immediately discernible, although sometimes the impact is readily observed. One needs only to look to the damage done by Starlings and House Sparrows to understand the problem. Prime examples in New Mexico are the near extinction of the Gila trout and the precarious status of the Rocky Mountain race of the cutthroat trout. Both these species have suffered hybridization through the introduction of the rainbow trout and are outcompeted by the introduced brown trout. The Barbary sheep introduced both by the Department of Game and Fish and by private interests are showing themselves capable of displacing native ungulates through their high reproductive capacity and their ability to thrive on impoverished rangeland.

On the positive side, we have continued efforts to work with The Nature Conservancy to acquire Centerfire Bog as mentioned in the summer issue of the *NMOS Bulletin*. Apparently this property is temporarily off the market because

of estate problems, but we still have hope that it can be acquired and protected.

The Nature Conservancy's collaboration with the State in a New Mexico Natural Heritage Program is about to become a going concern, having taken form through the establishment of an office in Santa Fe during the week of January 19th. In addition, I have completed during the year the initial compilation of an inventory of natural features which may be of some help to the Natural Heritage Program, but possibly more importantly, provides current information of places that need to be conserved pending the provision of something better in the way of site information. In the summer issue of the *NMOS Bulletin* there was an explanation of the objectives of establishing a State Natural Areas System and a Natural Features Registry.

Respectfully submitted,  
(signed)  
Henry M. Zeller,  
Conservation Chairman

#### CONSERVATION IN MEXICO

While we face a grave problem with habitat destruction here in the United States, the situation in Latin America, and especially Mexico, is far worse. Virgin forests are cleared constantly to provide food for one of the fastest growing populations in the world. And although migratory birds are protected by treaty in Mexico, the law is seldom enforced.

One man who is attempting to improve the situation in Mexico is Dr. Bernardo Villa Ramirez of the Universidad Nacional Autonoma de Mexico. Dr. Villa is well known to many North American ornithologists as the past head of the Direccion General de la Fauna Silvestre.

Dr. Villa has formed the Organo de Difusion de Bioconservacion A. C., a non-profit organization whose aim is the preservation of habitat in Mexico. The organization is founded and run by Mexicans, which should make it an effective voice in that country. Nevertheless, memberships are strongly solicited from interested parties all over the world. Membership is \$10.00 (US) annually, and includes a subscription in the well-prepared color magazine, *Supervivencia*, in Spanish.

Dr. Villa has pledged his personal resources to this endeavor, and has, for instance, paid wardens, out of his pocket, to protect the seabird colony at Isla Raza in the Gulf of California. His is a lone voice in the wilderness in Mexico, and he deserves our support. Applications for membership, and inquiries, should be addressed to the organization at Berlin 16-A, Mexico 6, D. F., MEXICO.

#### 1976 RENEWALS DUE NOW

This issue of the *Bulletin* is being sent to all members who were on the rolls in 1975, whether or not they have paid their 1976 dues. If you are one of those who has not paid, please do so now. The NMOS is a small organization, and we need your support.

Dues are \$5.00 annually, payable on January 1 of each year. Student memberships are \$2.50 annually, and family or organization memberships are \$7.50 annually. Remit dues to Claudia Hubbard, Secretary, NMOS, 2097 Camino Lado, Santa Fe, NM 87501

## BREEDING BIRD SURVEYS

BY JOHN HUBBARD

The U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service maintains a series of routes along roadways in New Mexico that have been the source of census data on breeding birds since 1968. At the present time these routes total 31, and only Colfax, Quay, Bernalillo, Guadalupe, Grant, and Sierra counties lack routes in them. Censusing a route is done by car on the morning of one day, generally in June. The procedure consists of 50 stops, each a half mile apart, over the 25 mile long route. At each stop all birds seen or heard in a three minute span are counted, with the first stop beginning exactly one half hour before dawn. The preferred crew consists of one person to observe birds and another to record them on the special forms.

Last year, 1975, 22 counts were carried out by 13 people. These routes were: Farmington (A. P. Nelson), Wageezi (H. B. Swain), Cebolla (H. B. Swain), Ojo Sarco (J. R. Travis), Grenville (K. D. Seyffert), Crownpoint (W. Stone), Torreon (J. P. Hubbard), Fence Lake (J. P. Hubbard), Correo (J. N. Durrie), Valencia (J. N. Durrie), Floyd (J. P. Hubbard), Horse Springs (J. P. Hubbard), Horse Mountain (B. C. McKnight), San Antonio (C. W. Coiner), Roswell (D. L. Boggs), Deming (C. W. Coiner), Jornada (R. J. Raitt), Cloudcroft (C. W. Coiner), Maljamar (J. P. Hubbard).

Nine counts were not run in 1975. These were located at Wagon Mound, Mora Co.; Watrous, Mora Co.; Corona, Lincoln Co.; Cooley Lake, DeBaca Co.; Carrizozo, Lincoln Co.; Caprock, Chaves-Lea Cos.; Gage, Luna Co.; Hope, Eddy Co.; and Animas, Hidalgo Co.

These counts are interesting, fun, and valuable, and I hope that in 1976 all of them will be run. In general, those who ran counts in 1975 have the choice of running them again in 1976, but beyond that all routes are available for the asking. I urge you to inquire about any route(s) that you would like to run, or to inform me if you must drop some. Let's get together and cover all 31 routes in 1976, by starting now to organize and plan. Anyone who can identify birds reasonably well is invited, and remember - practice makes perfect - so try your route on a dry run if possible before the real thing.

## SPRING MIGRATION STUDY

For some time now, the NMOS has been distributing and collecting forms similar to the one bound into this issue of the *Bulletin*. The data gathered in this way are being compiled to give us a better idea of the timing of migratory movements in New Mexico, and it is our hope that these data will be included in the upcoming revision of the *Check-list of the birds of New Mexico*.

Of course, our results will be no better than the data we collect, so it is up to you, the membership, to make the next edition of the *Check-list* a more valuable document. If you live in New Mexico, or if you bird in New Mexico, you are strongly urged to complete, as much as possible, and return the enclosed form. Even if you have only one date, submit it. Don't fail to submit the form because you think the dates are too late to be important; they might indicate a late spring, or a late migration into your local area of which you are not aware.

Return the forms to John Hubbard, 2097 Camino Lado, Santa Fe, New Mexico

FURTHER UPDATE OF THE NEW MEXICO BIRD-LIST

BY JOHN HUBBARD

In the last issue of the *NMCS Bulletin* (3:17-20, 1975), I gave an update of the New Mexico list of birds through early 1975. Unfortunately, I overlooked the recent substantiation of one species in the state, that being the Cape May Warbler. In addition, we now have confirmation that a previously-collected specimen is indeed a Thayer's Gull, and now it can be added to our list of species. This will bring the totals to 484 species reported in New Mexico, of which 426 are confirmed, 47 are hypothetical, and 12 are unaccepted. The additional data follow.

## ANNOTATED LIST

Thayer's Gull (*Larus thayeri*) An immature female collected (NMSU No. 2404) at Caballo Reservoir, Sierra Co., on 7 January 1963, by W. H. Conley, proves to be this species. Dr. Ned Johnson tentatively identified the specimen as *thayeri* in 1964, but until the AOU elevated this form to species rank (1973 Supplement) the matter had not sparked further interest. Recently, I borrowed the specimen and sent it to Dr. Joseph R. Jehl, Jr., of the San Diego Natural History Museum, where its identity was confirmed as a *thayeri* in first winter plumage. A second specimen, a female in juvenile plumage, was taken near Hatch, Doña Ana Co., on 28 October 1975 by Greg Schmitt (specimen to USNM), and was also identified by Dr. Jehl.

There are no other records of Thayer's Gull in the state, but observers should be on the lookout for it among Herring Gulls (*L. argentatus*). Field identification would be very difficult for all but experienced "gullers," so be very cautious if you try. You may want to report the gulls in this group as "Herring-type." Adult Thayer's, which would be rare in New Mexico, have dark eyes (versus light in Herring Gull), purple eye rings (versus yellowish in Herring), and wingtips that appear paler than Herring's when seen from below. Immatures are variable like Herrings, but those with paler wing tips from below might stand out. Check flocks of loitering gulls with a scope as perhaps the best of situations favorable to correctly identifying Thayer's Gull.

Cape May Warbler (*Dendroica tigrina*) A bird was found dead under a window at Silver City, Grant Co., on 4 October 1975, and it was preserved by Dale Zimmerman for the first state specimen. Previously there was a sight record by Dr. Zimmerman of a male at Silver City on 20 November 1966 and another there on 14 October 1975. The only other state record seems to be of a male seen near Cliff by Ralph Fisher et al. on 4 May 1974.

LONGSPURS IN NEW MEXICO

BY JOHN HUBBARD

There are four species of longspurs in the world, three of which are confined to North America (Smith's, *Calcarius pictus*; McCown's, *C. mccownii*; Chestnut-collared, *C. ornatus*) and one which is shared with Eurasia (Lapland, *C. lapponicus*). All longspurs are now placed in the genus *Calcarius*. This name is derived from the Latin *calcar*, in reference to the long "spur" or hind claw of these birds.

In New Mexico, three of the four species have been reliably recorded, with Smith's known only from an unsatisfactory sight record. At present, the abundance of the species (in descending order) is: Chestnut-collared (common), McCown's (rare to uncommon) and Lapland (Very rare), but this status may not always have been the case with McCown's Longspur. For example, down through the years over 40 McCown's (ML) have been collected in New Mexico, 30 between 1875 and 1899, nine between 1900 and 1940, and four in more recent times (Figure 1) Thus, at one time McCown's seems to have been much more numerous in the state, although whether it equalled the numbers of Chestnut-collared (CcL) we do not know. Lapland Longspurs (LL) are very rare, with specimen records in 1919 and 1929, a photographic record in 1975, and a reliable sight record in 1939 (Figure 1).

The apparent decline in the numbers of ML in our state led the Department of Game and Fish to place it on the New Mexico endangered species list, and the bird has also declined in other parts of its range. The causes of this decline are not well understood, but interestingly Baird's Sparrow (*Ammodromus bairdii*), another grassland finch, has shown a similar decline. Both of these species breed in the northern Great Plains and winter in the Southwest and adjacent Mexico, although the sparrow inhabits shrub-dotted grassland versus prairie for the longspur.

One of the problems in gathering reliable field data on our longspurs is in properly identifying them, for in winter plumage all bear more than a general resemblance to each other. The problem is compounded by the fact that when the birds alight in the grass they all but vanish, while in flight they generally bound away and offer only brief views. The best places to see them seem to be at various waterholes, where they come to drink in swirling flocks. Even when drinking, longspurs do not offer the best of views, for they pause only momentarily, and often present a scene of a mob of jostling birds. In winter plumage these circumstances act together to make identification of the rarer species, such as ML and LL, more difficult. That means that the observer must know what to look (and listen) for when he encounters winter longspurs, and in this regard I would like to pass along what I have learned to date.

I should begin by saying that in my early days of birding, had anyone asked me about longspur identification I would probably have not thought much about problems and would have regurgitated gleanings from the literature. For example, in field guides one finds statements that the easiest approach to winter longspur identification is through tail pattern, with voice, leg color, and other characters also invoked. However, about 1959 Dale Zimmerman told me of his experiences trying to identify longspurs in the field near Silver City and how frustrating it was. In particular, he related how he had collected several longspurs that appeared to have greater and others that had lesser amounts of white in the tail, only to find that all were Chestnut-collareds. Field guides lead one to believe that longspurs with more white are ML, somewhat less are CcL, and those with the least are Lapland and Smith's.

While the conclusion that the latter two species have the least white is correct, the former conclusion is suspect. The fact is, ML and CcL differ in tail white mainly in degree (Figure 1). If actual overlap does not exist, there is at least an approach in some birds that seriously undermines this as a distinguishing character. In addition, longspurs are not particularly cooperative in revealing their tail patterns for periods long enough for most observers to discern them. In some case, if one could follow one bird around

for an extended period, he might be able to identify it on the basis of tail pattern; however, this is not possible with many (or most) longspurs that one sees.

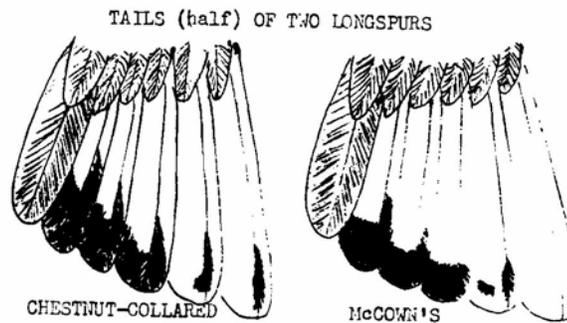
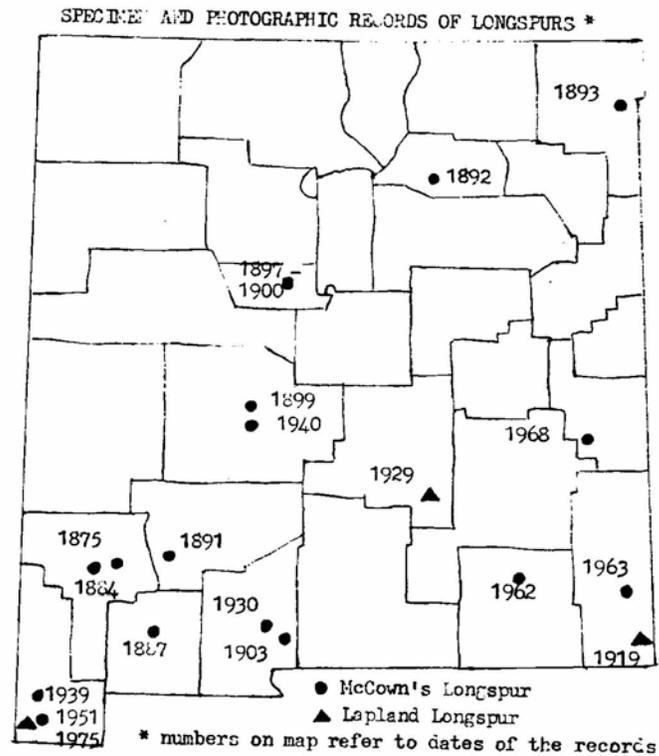


Figure 1

At this point, I should emphasize that I am not dismissing tail pattern as a field mark in longspurs, for it will allow segregation of ML and CcL from Smith's and Lapland. However, within each of these pairs, I have serious doubts about tail pattern as acceptable as a definitive field character.

If tail pattern does not allow field identification of ML and CcL, the question is, what will? As already indicated, in breeding plumage there is no problem in males, while female ML can be told from the brownish CcL females by their white and gray appearance. In winter plumage many males, both adult and first-year, of CcL can be discerned to be blackish on the under-parts, in spite of the profusion of light edgings on the feathers. For birds in female-like plumage a real problem exists, for this group includes females and some first-year CcL and all ML. One of the best approaches to identifying such birds is for the observer to park his car or sit down at a watering spot,

focus his glasses on the shore, and get ready for some fast-action scanning.

1. ML are somewhat larger than CcL, so quickly pick out what appear to be bigger birds for closer scrutiny.
2. Look at the bill; if it is large and mainly pale with a dark tip, the bird is most likely ML; CcL have noticeably smaller bills that are more extensively dark, beginning at the tip, than light.
3. Check Out the "shoulders" (actually the wrist), for in male ML there is a distinct cinnamon patch and in many females there is at least a cinnamon wing bar in the area. CcL have the shoulder area quite variable, but never with cinnamon. In general females have it brown with lighter tipping, adult males blackish with white tipping, and immature males vary between.

As regards the rarer longspurs, each would be readily identifiable in the breeding plumage of adult males. In winter and female plumage, Laplands are more reddish above (especially on the wings) than other longspurs, and the whitish underparts with blackish markings are also rather distinctive. Smith's in winter and female plumage looks temptingly easy to identify in field guides, but their characters of buffy underparts and white wingbars are shared with CcL. In fact, in autumn many CcL, apparently mainly immature males, would quite easily be mistaken in these characters for Smith's Longspurs, although the buff is oranger in the latter (brownier in CcL). If the field guides are correct, Smith's has paler legs than CcL, those of the latter being dark brown or blackish.

If I give the impression that winter longspurs are difficult to identify, then I have made my point. At the same time, however, the careful observer can be assured that identification is possible, given that proper conditions prevail and that the best characters are used.

Another area that may help in field identification of longspurs is voice, but this needs much more study. My experience indicates that longspur calls are more varied than the general literature leads one to believe. For example, in netting operations in the Animas Valley in November 1975, longspur calls were noted in wild birds that were flying and on the ground and in birds that were released after banding. We found that flying CcL have a commonly-uttered flight note, which is expressed as *til-lup*, *til-lip*, or *til-lil-lip* in Bent's *Life History* account of the species. We also heard a near-identical note from two ML that alit and then were flushed after banding. I would judge from this that these flight notes of the two species are quite similar and do not serve to distinguish them from each other.

We also heard a metallic *chink* and a dry rattle from flocks of flying longspurs, and at best we could ascertain that these were given by ML and not CcL. However, in Bent CcL are said to have a *trip* note and a rattling *trip-ri-ip*, and these could conceivably be similar to the above notes that we attributed to ML. At watering spots the longspurs kept up a constant hubub of bickering notes, which may be the equivalent of the continuous *buzz-buzz-buzz* notes ascribed to CcL in the Bent accounts. The notes of Lapland and Smith's longspurs also seem to be varied, with each having a rattle and a flight note. Field guides allude to the "clicking" nature of the flight note of Smith's, so observers might be alert for that in flocks of longspurs.