

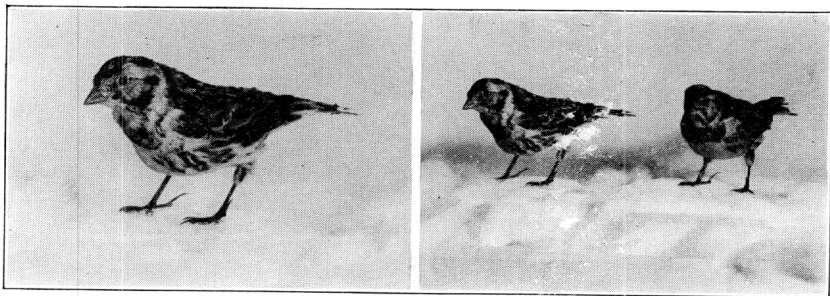
Lapland Longspurs in Illinois in the Early Spring of 1937

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The Lapland Longspur belongs to the family of finches and sparrows. It resembles somewhat and is occasionally confused with the vesper sparrow. It is 6.25 inches long and has for its most conspicuous field identification marks, a hind toe-nail as long as or longer than the toe, the white outer tail feathers which show in flight and noticeable amounts of black, ochraceous and cream buff markings about the head, breast and back, with a rufous patch on the nape of the neck.

According to Seton, these birds "when in the fields have a curious habit of squatting just behind some clod, and, as their colors are nearly matched to the soil, they are not easily observed, nor will they move until you are within a few feet; they then run a few feet and squat again."



Two views of Lapland Longspurs.

It was this curious habit which was responsible for attracting my attention to these birds upon two occasions the past winter namely February 16 and 21. On each date a strong westerly wind was driving snow, sleet and some dust as I was traveling south and west on State Route 100 in the Illinois River Valley between Beardstown and Chambersburg, Illinois. These birds were observed in flocks ranging in numbers from five to three hundred. They were flushed from the concrete road or near it and frequently they barely got out of the way in time to keep from being hit by the car. The fields and roads were white with snow everywhere except occasional stretches of concrete road and narrow short stretches of soil exposed just off the concrete slab where the motorists had driven off the edge. Here on these narrow exposed strips of soil these birds were sitting partly to rest on the soil where the snow had melted a little and partly in search of food. My first thought was as these birds flew away flashing the white in their

tail feathers that they were vesper sparrows but when the flocks grew larger as I approached Meredosia, I wondered about the correctness of my first thought. My car was moving along at a speed of 40 to 50 miles per hour and as you no doubt know one traveling along at that speed with visibility not the best on a cold snowy day the field marks could not be easily detected. It so happened that two birds were killed by the car on the first date mentioned above and five on the second date. These birds were taken to our laboratory where they were identified and again verified by Dr. Blanche McAvoy of the Biology department of Illinois State Normal University. Two of these birds were mounted and from pictures taken on the mounts I have lantern slides to exhibit with this paper.

It is my belief that the severity and frequency of the combined dust and snow storms the past winter had driven these birds far to the east of their usual winter quarters and migratory routes and thus they were encountered in great numbers in the Illinois River Valley. I estimated conservatively that I saw approximately three thousand Lapland Longspurs on the first trip. These birds usually migrate over the western plains and to some extent far to the East over the Appalachian region and do not regularly get this far south in such large numbers.

They nest on Arctic Islands, Alaska, Greenland and to the limit of the forests in Mackenzie.