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Horned Lark
Eremophila alpestris
 Order
 PASSERIFORMES
 – Family
 ALAUDIDAE
 Issue No. 195
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Habitat

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Horned Lark

habitat; Seligman, AZ; April.

Breeding Range

Open, generally barren country; avoids forests. Prefers bare ground to grasses taller than a few centimeters ([Wiens et al. 1987](#)). From sea level to elevations of 4,000 m ([Behle 1942](#)); from areas with <10 cm annual precipitation to those receiving >100 cm.

In nonagricultural lands, typically inhabits areas of short vegetation or bare ground, including shortgrass prairie, deserts, brushy flats, and alpine habitat ([Verbeek 1967](#), [Cannings and Threlfall 1981](#)). In shrubsteppe habitats, occupies areas characterized by low vegetation ([Rotenberry and Wiens 1980a](#)). In the Palearctic, restricted to tundra and barren steppes; other open habitats occupied by Skylark ([Cramp 1988](#)).

Barren breeding habitat, rarely associated with specific vegetation ([Bigelow 1902](#), [Behle 1942](#), [Bent 1942](#), [Beason and Franks 1974](#), [With and Webb 1993](#)). Areas suitable for nesting in early spring often unsuitable by late spring or early summer because vegetation grows too tall; in these situations, the birds generally abandon the area or forego further nesting ([Beason 1970](#)).

In agricultural areas, inhabits bare ground and fields of row crop stubble ([Forbes 1907](#), [Cox 1958](#), [Graber and Graber 1963](#), [Beason 1970](#)). Frequently makes use of waste grains in livestock feed lots, especially in winter ([Beason 1970](#)). In areas grazed by livestock, population densities highest in most heavily grazed areas; among the most abundant of any species in grazed areas ([Kantrud and Kologiski 1983](#), [Bock and Webb 1984](#)).

One of the first avian species to colonize bare ground made available by reclamation of surface mines (Whitmore 1979, 1980) or brush removal (Castrale 1982, Wiens and Rotenberry 1985, Petersen and Best 1987); highest population densities coincide with greatest amount of bare ground. Use of mowed areas around airstrips has allowed species to colonize regions where no other suitable habitat may exist nearby (e.g., forested regions of central and w. Ontario) (Hussell 1987).

Spring And Fall Migration

Same habitats as occupied at other times of year, although increased use of beaches and sand dunes; also mowed areas such as airfields. In palearctic populations, found on coastal dunes, salt marshes, and beaches in addition to normal habitats of agricultural lands, tundra, and steppes (Cramp 1988). North American flocks of migrants often intermix with resident conspecifics, and even form mixed-species flocks with other migrants such as longspurs and buntings (see Behavior: social and interspecific behavior).

Winter Range

Similar to habitats occupied during breeding and migration periods. In Oklahoma, for example, the shortest vegetation available (Grzybowski 1976, 1983a, b); in Massachusetts, ocean beaches, sand dunes, airfields (Veit and Petersen 1993). Frequently concentrated along roadsides when ground is covered with deep snow.

Food HabitsMigration

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