

HORNED LARK (EREMOPHILA ALPESTRIS)

The horned lark is a common widespread terrestrial bird that occurs in both the New World and the Old World. In North America, it breeds from the Arctic to Mexico. Northernmost populations tend to migrate south for the winter.

Populations in other areas remain year-round, though they may move to lower elevations during cold periods. In Utah, the horned lark is a common permanent resident in open deserts, and less frequently, in alpine meadows.

Horned larks walk along the ground foraging for food, and only occasionally will they perch on a plant to forage. Horned larks are primarily herbivores feeding off available seeds from weeds and grasses. However, during breeding season they are known to feed insects to their young. Males begin to establish territories in January. They then engage in courtship song-flight displays for the females, and monogamous pair bonds are formed. The female selects the nesting site, which is generally on bare ground. She spends a day or two digging a small depression in the ground using her bill and feet. A few days later, she weaves a nest in this cavity using grasses and roots, and then lines it with soft materials. The female incubates her clutch of three or four eggs for about twelve days. The young are born naked and blind, and both parents feed the hatchlings. The chicks leave the nest after approximately nine to twelve days. Although they can forage for food soon after leaving the nest, the young continue to receive food from their parents for another week or more. Juveniles form small groups during the summer, and in the fall they will join larger flocks. Populations breeding in the south generally have two broods in a season. The female re-nests just seven days after her first young leave the nest.