

horned lark *Eremophila alpestris*

Kingdom: Animalia

Division/Phylum: Chordata

Class: Aves

Order: Passeriformes

Family: Alaudidae

ILLINOIS STATUS common, native

FEATURES

The horned lark averages seven to eight inches in length (tail tip to bill tip in preserved specimen). The male is a brown bird with black “sideburns,” two, small black horns and a black breast splotch. The female and immature are similarly patterned but not as striking in coloration. This bird has an extended claw on its rear-facing toes.

BEHAVIORS

The horned lark is a common, permanent resident statewide. It lives in open areas, such as fields, pastures, golf courses, airports and along roads. This bird can fly but is often seen walking. In the spring, it flies high into the air and sings an irregular, high-pitched song. The breeding season occurs from February through July. The nest is built on the ground, usually in a shallow depression. This nest of plant materials lined with grasses is built by the female in two to four days. One side of the nest may have small stones or dirt clods. Four, green or gray eggs with dark markings are deposited by the female, and she alone incubates them for the 11-day incubation period. Two broods are produced per year. The horned lark eats grains, grass seeds and insects.

HABITATS

Aquatic Habitats

wet prairies and fens

Woodland Habitats

none

Prairie and Edge Habitats

black soil prairie; dolomite prairie; edge; gravel prairie; hill prairie; sand prairie; shrub prairie

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