

FIELD OBSERVATION REPORT

By Mary Wilson
February 16, 2019



Congratulations to the Tehachapi Tomo Kahni group for 25 years of California State Park service.

Antelope Valley California Poppy Reserve

The Joshua trees in front of the visitor center are starting to get their first buds. Other plants that are starting to bloom are:



Filaree



Slender Keel Fruit



Forget-me-nots



The poppy plants are still producing leaves.

Arthur B. Ripley Desert Woodland State Park

The Joshua trees are producing their first buds. The snow in the Tehachapi Mountains is a wonderful backdrop for the Joshua and Juniper trees. It was hard to find a place to get a photo of the snow and mountains without windmills and solar panels. Ripley was one of the best places to do just that.



HORNED LARKS

The motion cameras in the burrowing owl area captured a large flock of horned larks on December 19, 2018.



If you look you can see a lot of horned larks feeding. They forage by walking and running on the ground, picking up insects and seeds from the ground or from plants low enough to reach. When nesting they will forage in flocks.



A few seconds later they took off. If disturbed, the flock makes away in swift and twisting flight. It is amazing how many of these birds were there.



HORNED LARK

Eremophila alpestris

By Mary Wilson

The horned lark can be found across much of North America from Alaska and Canada south to most of the southern states, except for the Deep South. It winters in most of the United States, including the southern states. They live year round in California.



The horned lark is the only lark native to North America. The horned lark is found in open areas and areas with short grass. It is often found in fields, prairies, on lawns, near airports and along beaches.

The horned lark is a ground-dwelling bird but it may perch on a fence post or tree stump. On the ground, it doesn't hop, it walks or runs! They walk over the ground in search of insects, especially adults and larval lepidoptera, ants, wasps, bugs and spiders in summer. They eat weed seeds, grain, and small fruits throughout the year.

Its length is 7-1/4 inches with a wing span of 12 inches, has a tan back, a black crescent-shaped patch on its breast, a black stripe on its face, and a black square-tipped tail. It has a yellow throat and tufts of feathers on its head that look like horns. It has a long, straight claw on its hind toe called a larkspur. Male and female horned larks look alike, but the female is a little duller in color. Horned larks are slender, medium-sized songbirds. The song is a tinkling, irregular, high-pitched, from ground or air and sounds like "Tsee-titi".

During mating, the male horned lark flies above the female in circles and sings. He then dives toward the ground with his wings folded. Just before he hits the ground, he opens his wings and lands. They begin nesting early in spring in barren fields. The nest, built by the female, is on open ground and she makes a slight depression lined with grass, weeds, rootlets, with an inner lining of fine grass or plant down. One side of nest often has flat "doorstep" of pebbles.

The female lays 2-5 eggs that are pale gray to greenish white, blotched and spotted with brown. She incubates the eggs for 10-14 days. The male and the female feed and care for the chicks. The chicks fledge when they are 9-12 days old and will not be able to fly for another week. Their parents continue to feed them. The female may have as many as three broods a year.

This species faces two major threats to its breeding habitat. In tundra areas, global warming is melting permafrost, allowing growth of vegetation in areas that formerly provided the open habitat it relies on. Second, in agricultural areas, horned larks breed in fallow fields, but are disturbed when the fields are planted and crops grow up before the larks can finish nesting, or worse, their nests are destroyed by agricultural activities.

YOUNG BUROWING OWLS DOING WING PRACTICE

