

Utah Rare Bird Report

Species: **McCown's Longspur**

Number of individuals: 1

Date: January 6, 2013

County: Weber

Location: Fields near Harold Crane WMA on 900S, Looking north from: ~41.2505904,-112.19481

Possibly NW of the green marker here:

<https://maps.google.com/?ie=UTF8&t=p&z=13&q=41.2505904,-112.19481&ll=41.2505904,-112.19481>

Observer Name: Doug Gochfeld

Other Observers: Ryan O'Donnell, At least one other independent observer (Mike Hearrell??) with whom I wasn't acquainted.

Time/Duration of sighting: Seen briefly twice in the vicinity of ~9:15-9:25 AM

Weather: Overcast, even light, light wind. Very cold (~10-15 degrees F).

Distance from birds: ~150-250 yards.

Optics used: 25-50X Leica APO Televid Telescope

Field Notes (in *italics*) written shortly after the encounter:

I viewed it twice through a scope. The first time I could not figure out what plain-headed species I was staring at, since I only saw the head as it foraged around. It was fairly big-headed and bulky-billed, with a wide pale supercilium that contrasted a bit with the slightly less pale, creamy, auriculars. Pale throat with a subtle malar line. Definitely did NOT have a central crown stripe (uniform washed-out light brown forehead/head).

The second time I had a better, more prolonged, look. I noted the same head pattern and size/shape (big/bulky head & bill in comparison to the rest of the bird). It also took flight briefly, and white wedges on the tail were evident. They were on both sides of the tail, and ran the length, widest at the tip, and narrowest at the base. Saw this briefly, but definitively. It was loosely associating with 3-4 Lapland Longspurs, and I was able to look at it in direct comparison to them, before ceding my scope to Ryan O'Donnell shortly before everything spooked because of the Northern Shrike.

The overall size, shape, and behavior narrow this down to one of our field-dwelling birds, of which Snow Bunting and Horned Lark are easily eliminated by facial pattern and lack of obvious white around head and upperparts/wings (The absence of the latter features eliminating Snow Bunting). The plain face also eliminated another initially likely candidate in Lapland Longspur, and it was viewed next to other Lapland Longspurs. I have extensive experience with Lapland Longspurs from both winters on the East Coast, and from seeing thousands each of the last two years on St. Paul Island, Alaska (in almost all plumages). The plain face and wings narrow it down to either McCown's or Chestnut-collared Longspur, with the obvious white wedges in the tail and bulky, thick bill being diagnostic for McCown's Longspur, as Chestnut-collared never shows such extensive white in the tail, especially in that particular shape, and doesn't have as bulky a bill. I have seen McCown's Longspurs twice previously, both in March 2012 in Kansas, one encounter including over a hundred individuals which I was able to spend a lot of time with.

Other documentation:

None

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