

## “Hoyt's” Horned Lark (*E. a. hoyti*)

November 2013: I visited the Canadian Museum of Nature collections to investigate Hoyt's Horned Lark and its occurrence, as a migrant, in Ont. To summarize: What is a Hoyt's Horned Lark and how can I find one? From Pittaway (1994):

*Hoyt's is the north-central subspecies. It breeds on the "arctic islands south to northeastern Alberta, northwestern Saskatchewan, northeastern Manitoba, extreme north-western Ontario (Fort Severn)" (Godfrey 1986). It intergrades with Northern Horned Lark along the coast of Hudson Bay in Ontario (James 1991). Hoyt's migrates mainly through the Prairie Provinces (Taverner 1937) and is a regular migrant from Lake Superior westward (Alan Wormington, pers. comm.). Hoyt's is a large bird like the Northern Horned Lark but similar in appearance to Prairie Horned Lark, typically with a white supercillium (eye-brow) and pale yellow restricted to the middle of the throat (Ridgway 1907, Roberts 1955). It is a rare to uncommon migrant and winter visitor to southern ON usually mixed in with large flocks of Northern Horned Larks. Don Sutherland, Paul Pratt, and Alan Wormington visited a feeder in Leamington in Feb 1982, where "a wintering flock of Horned Larks contained many Prairie and two Hoyt's amongst the predominant Northerns. There, combined side by side, the Hoyt's dwarfed the otherwise similar Prairies and seemed larger and distinctly paler than the Northerns.*



**Figure 1:** Horned Lark - Subspecies comparison (left to right): Prairie Horned Lark (*E. a. praticola*) - Hoyt's Horned Lark (*E. a. hoyti*) - Northern Horned Lark (*E. a. alpestris*). In order to attempt an apples-to-apples comparison, all three specimens are males and collected from their breeding grounds during the breeding months. Prairie = Kemptville, ON in June, Hoyt's = Churchill, MB in June, Northern = James Bay in June.



**Figure 2:** The same three, in the same order.



**Figure 3:** A dead-ringer Hoyt's Horned Lark. Mark Field and I observed this Hoyt's along Akins Rd., near Richmond, Ont. On 24 March 2014. Mark and I observed this bird for quite a while. We noticed that 1) it was very pallid and 2) it was noticeably larger than adjacent Horned Larks. Photo credit: Mark Field.



**Figure 4:** Mark Gawn took this photo of a large, pallid Horned Lark near Casselman, ON on 3 January 2014. Pallid overall (albeit, back-lit) Very pale brow, reduced yellow (faint blush) to the throat. Ottawa-east.

**Comments on the bird Mark Gawn photographed on 3 January 2014:**

**Don Sutherland:** *Looks good (for Hoyt's). In my limited experience with hoyti, individuals often appear slightly larger than adjacent alpestris, but this may be somewhat of an optical illusion. When you see hoyti/alpestris with praticola, the size is quite obvious.*

**Glenn Coady:** *I presume with a very experienced and astute observer like Mark viewing this bird, that it is clearly as big or bigger than all of the alpestris HOLA it is being seen with. That being said, with the back-lighting it is hard to properly determine how pale this bird actually is. The greatest trouble is with the intergrades between Hoyt's Horned Larks and Northern Horned Larks which occur on the Hudson Bay coast. This bird looks a little darker to me than birds I see at Cambridge Bay, Nunavut (hoyti for certain) and more in keeping with the birds I have seen at Churchill, Manitoba, many of which are hoyti/alpestris intergrades. If you have any photos from other sun angles, preferably with alpestris for comparison, I might be able to better assess them.*

**References**

Pittaway, R. 1994. Recognizable Forms: Subspecies of Horned Lark. *Ontario Birds* 12: 109-115