

Lapland Longspur *Calcarius lapponicus*



Folk Name: Lapland Bunting

Status: Winter Visitor

Abundance: Very Rare to Rare

Habitat: Stubble fields, plowed fields, dirt patches

The Lapland Longspur has been described as a “sporadic, extralimital wanderer” in the Carolinas. On its breeding grounds in northern Canada it is a very common bird, but it is quite the winter rarity here in the southeastern United States. When a Lapland Longspur is encountered here, it is usually seen in association with a flock of Horned Larks that have descended out of the North.

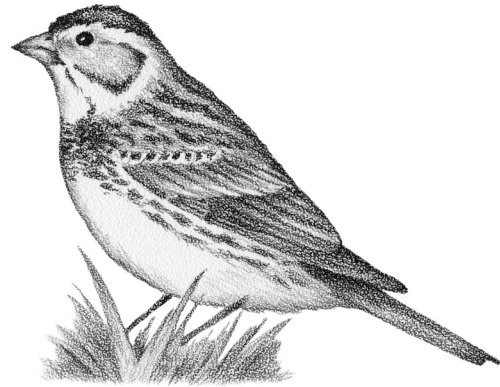
The first specimen of Lapland Longspur ever found in South Carolina was a bird collected in Chester County by Leverett Loomis on January 1, 1881. Loomis reported this longspur was found in “a small flock of ‘Shore Larks’ feeding upon offal in a barn-yard.” A second Lapland Longspur was not found in South Carolina until 1935, almost a half century later.

In North Carolina, Lapland Longspurs were reported fewer than 10 times by 1965. One of these reports came from Iredell County and was published in *The Chat* in 1946: “Lapland Longspurs at Statesville, North Carolina. J.C. Crawford reports seeing six Lapland Longspurs on his farm one day this winter after a snow. The birds were digging under the snow for seeds.” (These birds were incorrectly reported as “Smith’s” Longspurs in the May–June 1946 issue of *Audubon Field Notes*.)

The frequency of sightings in our region has increased since these two initial reports, but Lapland Longspur is still a rarity here. Ali Winrich and David Wright located a solitary Lapland Longspur in York County on October 9, 1983. They studied the bird carefully and



Lapland Longspur in a backyard in Huntersville.
(Kevin Metcalf)



J F M A M J J A S O N D

heard it calling. Local birders were surprised to discover Lapland Longspurs present in unpaved parking lots at the Charlotte Motor Speedway in Cabarrus County during the winter of 1985–1986. David Wright turned up at least seven birds there. Dick Brown found them in the same area in December 1986, at least two were found there from December 2 to 28 in 1987, and five showed up there in 1988, arriving in November. At one point, birders with their spotting scopes set up in the parking lots could watch Lapland Longspurs and Horned Larks in one direction and swing their scopes around and watch the cast of the movie *Days of Thunder* filming on the track in the other direction. Since then, groups of one to five birds have been counted at the speedway at least six other years: 1990, 1992, 2009, 2010, 2012, and 2013.

Five additional sightings of Lapland Longspur have been reported from the region. First, Doug Shadwick and Len Pardue found one bird near the town of Albemarle in Stanly County present from December 1993 into January 1994. Second, one bird was found on the Shelby Christmas Bird Count on December 17, 2006. Third, Kevin Metcalf photographed a “very unexpected” bird that briefly visited his backyard in the Town of Huntersville on February 21, 2010. These three are first county records. The fourth report comes from Simon Thompson who found a Lapland Longspur with a flock of Horned Larks in a harvested corn field in Cleveland County on January 15, 2015. He noted its feeding habit of creeping along the ground in furrows, and he reported the “chestnut wing panel was seen well.” Lastly, one was reported on the Lake Wateree CBC held on January 5, 2001.

The earliest recorded date of the arrival of Lapland Longspur in the Central Carolinas is 9 October, and the latest date one has been seen is 26 February. Like other migrants, Lapland Longspurs face many challenges on their migration routes to and from their breeding grounds each spring and fall. Timing of migration movements can

be critical to the bird's survival. *The Greenville News* (SC) reported this tragic incident that occurred in the town of Mandan, North Dakota, in 1931:

Several thousand birds—all chestnut-colored [sic] [and] Lapland longspurs—hit the northland trail

too early and flew to their death last night. The birds lay in heaps today on Mandan streets. A taxidermist said the longspurs, akin to the sparrow, apparently were attracted by the city's lights on their premature northward flight and, blinded by a snowstorm, flew into wires and other obstructions.