

Bird Field Note
Eric Rasmussen
February 15, 2014



Light feathers on its head give this rough-legged hawk a frosty appearance.

A group of green-winged teal briefly touch down in a small opening on the Clubhouse pond.



A northern shrike surveys Partridge Alley for a winter morsel.



Shrubby Draw Surveys

This week we saw flocks of foraging birds gather on the only exposed soil that remained after the deep snowfall: the highly eroded, south-facing slopes of the shrubby draws. Few birds use these areas in the breeding season or during migration. Horned larks dominated the flocks, replacing American tree sparrows as our top bird.

Birds detected in shrubby draw surveys 2/10, 2/11, and 2/12.

Species	Partridge Alley			Sheep Camp			Tongue Creek			Total
	2/10	2/11	2/12	2/10	2/11	2/12	2/10	2/11	2/12	
Horned Lark	187	100	77		27	38		23	124	576
American Tree Sparrow	14	8	2	8	2	44	12	26	10	126
Gray Partridge	7	12	13		5	13		6	3	59
Snow Bunting						29		13	5	47
Black-billed Magpie	2	1		2	4	1		2		12
Black-capped Chickadee	2					3				5
Song Sparrow	1			1					3	5
Northern Shrike	1				1	2				4
Short-eared Owl						1			1	2
Clark's Nutcracker				1						1
Common Raven									1	1
Golden Eagle								1		1
Northern Flicker		1								1
Northern Harrier	1									1
Prairie Falcon		1								1
Rough-legged Hawk	1									1
Red-tailed Hawk				1						1
Unknown Bird			1							1
Total	216	123	93	13	39	131	12	71	147	845



The beginning of the week started with 6-8 inches of snow. Seeds at the top of plants provided easy pickings for horned larks.



By week's end, warmer temperatures and sunshine had exposed the roads and south-facing slopes. Conspicuous flocks of birds congregated in these areas.





American tree sparrows stuck closer to shrubby portions of the draws.



A single snow bunting stands out against the dark hillside.





We observed a new species amidst a flock of 187 Horned Larks. This **chestnut-collared longspur** marks our 204th bird species at MPG. Chestnut-collared longspurs breed in Eastern Montana, but according to the Montana Natural Heritage Program, this is the first record west of the divide since the early 1900s, and the first winter observation for the entire state.

Kate and Kerr both detected short-eared owls in different draws on 2/12. Their plumage closely matches the exposed dirt and dead vegetation of the hillsides.



We rarely see gray partridges exposed like these two individuals. Their large size and flocking behavior make them good targets for foraging raptors.



Rough-legged hawks consistently perch near the center pivot fields.



A male northern flicker probes for insects inside the fissured bark of a ponderosa pine.



