

On the morning of 31 March 1984, Harry LeGrand observed a "black-hooded" gull at Greenview Farm just south of Raleigh, N.C. It, along with approximately 10 Ring-billed Gulls (*L. delawarensis*), was standing on the ground, presumably feeding on insects in a closely grazed pasture. LeGrand was able to approach within 50 m and observed the following marks: a blackish hood with wide white "eyebrows," a fairly slender sooty-red bill, a medium gray back followed by a white and a black band near the wing tip, and dusky legs. When the bird flushed, the wings showed the white band on the primaries that separated the gray mantle from the black near the tips of the primaries. Other features that distinguished this Franklin's Gull from the somewhat similar Laughing Gull were the moderately short wings with rounded tips and a body size noticeably smaller than that of the Ring-billed Gulls.

The second gull was independently discovered several hours later by Jim Mulholland, who also identified it as a Franklin's Gull. At least a half-dozen other birders saw it later in the day and early the following day (1 April), but it was not seen thereafter.

The occurrence of the immature Franklin's Gull was apparently not related to any unusual weather features. However, the adult bird was likely brought to North Carolina by an unusually strong spring storm system. This system moved east from the southern Great Plains and passed through the Carolinas on 28 March 1984, bringing heavy rain and spawning many tornadoes.

These represent only the second and third known records of the Franklin's Gull for North Carolina. The first record is for an immature bird collected on the Catawba River near Charlotte on 13 October 1952 (Chat 17:23-24). It is likely that Franklin's Gulls are not nearly so rare in the state as the three records indicate. A few of these gulls, particularly immatures, could occur each fall on the coast and be easily overlooked among the ubiquitous Laughing Gulls. However, an inland Franklin's Gull is much less likely to be passed over as a Laughing Gull because of the latter's rarity away from tidewater areas.

Horned Larks as Breeding Birds in the Sandhills of North Carolina

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To contemplate the idea of Horned Larks (*Eremophila alpestris*) as summer residents of the Sandhills of North Carolina consumes positive effort. Nonetheless, Greg Dearing, a local nature enthusiast, informed me that he and his brother, James Dearing, had found them on the Fort Bragg Military Reservation about the middle of July. The birds were seen along a dirt runway on the Saint Mere Eglise Drop Zone.

Permission was obtained to visit the site, and my first sighting occurred on 21 July 1982. I was accompanied by Terry Myers, who is a Wildlife Biologist with the Fort Bragg Wildlife Branch of the Directorate of Engineering and Housing. In about an hour we saw 25 to 27 Horned Larks, including perhaps five males and two or three females. The rest appeared to be immature birds. Several observations were made of adults feeding immature birds.

Because Myers and another biologist, Tommy Hughes, had seen four or five Horned Larks on or about 26 May 1982 in an area adjacent the Installation Landfill, we decided to check this area. Shortly after our arrival at the landfill, we located the larks. There were about 15 to 17 birds, and we were able to distinguish three or four males. The rest appeared to be immatures. Although female birds were missed or were inconspicuous, we again noticed adult birds feeding young.

When I visited the landfill again on 24 July 1982, I was accompanied by Henry Rankin Jr. and my son, Jim Crutchfield. Our activity seemed to agitate the birds, so an accurate count was not possible; however, we saw about 15 to 20 birds. On this occasion we were able to determine the composition of the population, which contained about 3 or 4 males, 2 or 3 females, and 10 to 13 immature birds. Adults, mostly males, were again feeding immatures. Two feeding procedures were noted. (1) An immature bird would position itself close by a male and go into a posturing behavior by fluffing its feathers, fluttering its wings, spreading them in a hover position, and uttering a series of call notes until fed. The young bird would then follow the adult by walking. (2) Two birds would appear more or less together, but independently foraging across an area. The adult male would pick up an insect and walk over to the other bird, placing the insect in its beak. The adult male would then walk away, continuing to forage. Occasionally a stray bird, presumably an immature, would intrude and be promptly chased away by the male.

The currently understood summer range of the Horned Lark in North Carolina is essentially west of the fall line (Peterson 1980, Potter et al. 1980). Horned Larks are considered rare during the summer in those coastal-plain counties of the Sandhills adjacent the piedmont, and no evidence of breeding has been reported previously. Additionally, no summer records were known for Cumberland County during the past 70 years.

Our evidence of breeding came from observations of various types of breeding behavior and from specimens. On 21 July 1982 there was an instance of territorial display by a single male at the landfill site. Numerous observations were made of adults (mostly males) feeding immature birds at both sites on 21 July and at the one site on 24 July 1982. Because larks generally remain in the vicinity of established colonies, especially in the southern portions of their ranges (Potter et al. 1980), any adult-young feeding behavior can be assumed to be associated with the breeding site. The presence of larks at the landfill site through December 1982 and through April 1983 further bears out this idea. No nests were discovered.

An additional site was discovered on the Fort Bragg Military Reservation on 29 April 1983 in the vicinity of the Jump School Parachute Tower. A pair of birds was encountered. On 9 May 1983, only the male was seen here.

The habitat at all Fort Bragg sites is typical of that normally preferred by the species, that is, stubble fields, airports, and other areas of short vegetation and bare earth.

The Saint Mere Eglise Drop Zone is situated along the southern edge of the Fort Bragg Military Reservation in Hoke County in the Puppy Creek Drainage of the Rock Fish Creek System. The area comprises 700 to 800 acres with a rolling terrain quite characteristic of the Sandhills. As a drop zone, the area is being maintained in a vegetative stage of succession called the perennial grass stage, which resembles a grassland. In the late summer, it supports combinations of medium-tall grasses, of which

broomstraw (*Andropogon* sp.) and wire grass (*Aristida* sp.) are characteristic along with forbaceous species that mostly belong to the Aster, Figwort, and Legume families. In the area adjacent the dirt runways, the vegetation is shorter in stature with patches of bare earth, a feature of more recent disturbance. The vegetation is of low-growing annual plants that include crabgrass (*Digitaria* sp.), horseweed (*Erigeron* sp.), and lespedeza (*Lespedeza* sp.).

The landfill site is on the Fort Bragg Military Reservation in Cumberland County. Situated on a hillside, it covers perhaps 100 acres. Only some 10 acres of recently reclaimed land is presently being inhabited by the larks. The plant cover is in the early stages of secondary succession as described by Oosting (1942). It features mostly low-growing annual plants along with legume plantings of flat pea (*Lathyrus* sp.), lespedeza, partridge pea (*Cassia* sp.), and sweet clover (*Melilotus* sp.). These were planted by personnel of the Fort Bragg Wildlife Branch.

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A Brown Thrasher with an Aberrant Culmen

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On or about 15 January 1979 a female Brown Thrasher (*Toxostoma rufum*) with an extremely long beak was found dead in a suburban yard in Sumter, Sumter County, S.C. The collector is unknown. The specimen was salvaged by the S.C. Wildlife and Marine Resources Department. The carcass was prepared as a study skin (CM No. 1984.51).

The length (chord) of this individual's maxilla from the base of the skull is 105 mm. The mandible, which appears to have been broken, is 66 mm. In addition to their unusual length (Fig. 1), each element is twisted to the left, the maxilla more so than the mandible, so that viewed dorsally, the beak is crossed.

The average maxilla (exposed culmen) length of 10 normal Brown Thrashers in the Charleston Museum is 25.3 mm., 24% that of the aberrant specimen.

The individual weighed 44 g when received at the museum, and although it was dehydrated, this is still considerably less than the 67.6 g average of four Brown Thrashers banded on Sullivan's Island in October 1983. The low weight of the thrasher suggests that it starved. It is astounding that it survived for the length of time it took the beak to attain such an abnormal length.