

## First Record of Chestnut-collared Longspur for North Carolina

Harry E. LeGrand Jr.  
N.C. Natural Heritage Program  
P.O. Box 27687  
Raleigh, NC 27611

On 28 February 1992, a winter-plumaged Chestnut-collared Longspur (*Calcarius ornatus*) was identified in the grass and dirt parking lots at the Charlotte Motor Speedway near Harrisburg, NC, by Taylor Piephoff and several other birders from nearby Charlotte. A number of people visited the speedway over the next week to observe this bird, which was the first individual of the species ever reported for North Carolina. I was able to observe the longspur at leisure on 29 February. The vegetation was one-inch high or less, making the bird readily visible in the short grass and bare ground.

In general, the longspur, presumably a female, looked somewhat like a female House Sparrow (*Passer domesticus*). It was between one and two inches shorter in overall length than a Horned Lark (*Eremophila alpestris*) that was present for size comparison. The longspur had a pale buff or beige color on the underparts; the whitish throat was paler than the rest of the underparts. There were thin, narrow streaks at the top of the breast (giving a faint necklace appearance) and on the sides of the breast. At much of a distance, however, those streaks were essentially invisible. The upperparts were heavily streaked with dark brown to black, with buff streaks interspersed. No rufous collar was seen. The wings were dark, with three narrow and pale wingbars.

The head had a brownish cap with some pale streaking. There was a dark brown stripe through the eye and continuing beyond the eye. Another dark stripe under the eye appeared to outline a paler cheek patch. There was a dark malar stripe. Otherwise, the ground color of the face was beige or pale buff. The bill was medium-sized and conical; the color was gray or horn. The size and color of the bill did not attract attention.

Several aspects of the bird, however, were attention-getting. The tail was quite short. Triangular wedges of white at the base of the tail could be seen when the bird was in flight, leaving a dark triangle on the tail (pointed at the base and wide at the tip). The tail showed more white and appeared shorter than the tails of Lapland Longspur (*C. lapponicus*) and Smith's Longspur (*C. pictus*). Also noted in flight was a distinctive call note — a “chit-tle” call that was vaguely reminiscent of a House Sparrow call. I heard no rattle call, though the

species does give a rattle call (as do other longspur species) on the wintering grounds.

The dark triangle pattern of the tail and the "chit-tle" call are characteristic of the Chestnut-collared Longspur. No other longspur species apparently gives a soft, finch-like, two-syllable call. The McCown's Longspur (*C. mccownii*) has a dark "T" on the tail instead of a dark triangle, a distinction that can be difficult to discern on flying birds. The McCown's has a noticeably large bill, and it does not give a two-syllable "chit-tle" call. Other longspurs, pipits, and sparrows that have white on the tail do not have such large amounts of white that the dark area of the tail is limited to a triangle.

The Chestnut-collared Longspur remained at the speedway into early March. It was photographed by David Wright and Mary Welty. These photos have been deposited at the N.C. Museum of Natural Sciences, as have written descriptions of the bird. The N.C. Bird Records Committee (1993) accepted both the descriptions and the photos (*Chat* 57:66); thus, the species has been placed on the Official List. The Chestnut-collared Longspur has not been reported previously from South Carolina or Georgia. Virginia has at least two records for the species -- eight birds in Roanoke on 13 April 1958 and one bird photographed at Chincoteague National Wildlife Refuge on 5 June 1977 (Virginia Society of Ornithology 1987).

#### Literature Cited

- North Carolina Bird Records Committee. 1993. Report of the North Carolina Bird Records Committee -- 1992. *Chat* 57:65-68.
- Virginia Society of Ornithology. 1987. Virginia's birdlife: an annotated checklist. *Virginia Avifauna* No. 3, The Virginia Society of Ornithology, Inc.