

Eremophila alpestris strigata

English name streaked horned lark

Scientific name *Eremophila alpestris strigata*

Other scientific names none

Risk status

BC: possibly extirpated (SH); red-listed

Canada: COSEWIC: under assessment

Global: imperilled (G5T2)

Elsewhere: Oregon – imperilled? (S2?); Washington – critically imperilled (S1B, SZN); candidate for United States national endangered species list

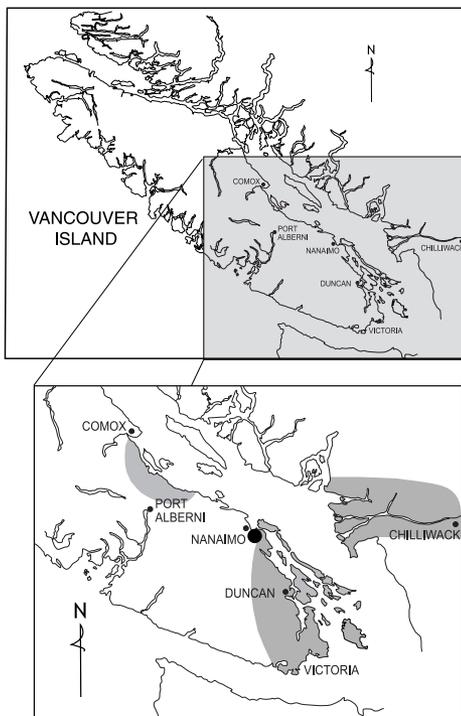
Range/Known distribution

The historical breeding range of streaked horned larks was confined to the coastal plain of southwestern British Columbia, Washington and Oregon. In British Columbia, streaked horned larks occur in the Fraser Valley west of Chilliwack and have also been recorded on Vancouver Island around Comox and Victoria.

Populations in British Columbia were likely never numerous, and this subspecies is now virtually extirpated from Vancouver Island (one territorial male was seen during the 2002 breeding season). Recent unconfirmed occurrences in the Lower Fraser Valley are limited to a few non-breeding birds. Breeding has not been documented in British Columbia since 1978.

Populations in the United States have also been in decline over recent decades. About 300-500 birds are thought to currently occur in Washington and Oregon. The severe decline of this subspecies throughout its range could result in its extinction.

Streaked horned larks are partial migrants. Historical records indicate that some birds from coastal British Columbia moved to Washington and Oregon for the winter, while others



Distribution of *Eremophila alpestris strigata*

● possible former breeding distribution

● recent record of territorial male

apparently overwintered in the Fraser Delta. It is not known where the few remaining Canadian birds spend the winter.

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Field Description

6". A small, long-winged passerine with a dark brown back and a short, stout beak. It has a ruddy brown nape, yellowish underparts, and yellow throat and eyestripe. The adult male is distinctively marked with a **dark facial mask and breastband** that contrasts with the pale face and throat. Close up, one can see **tiny black feather tufts** ("horns") on either side of the male's head. The female is duller, smaller and lacks "horns." Juveniles are indistinctly marked.

Streaked horned larks spend much of their time on the ground. Adults are primarily granivorous (seed-eating), although they also consume insects during the breeding season. Parents feed insects to their young.

IDENTIFICATION TIPS

Streaked horned larks can be distinguished by the **brown streaking on the sides of the breast**.



Dennis Paulson

Eremophila alpestris strigata

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Life History

In the Georgia Depression, breeding occurred from early April to late August. Male streaked horned larks arrive on the breeding grounds before the females and establish their territories. When the female bird arrives, she selects a mate and finds a nest site within his territory. Pairs are monogamous for at least one breeding season. The female bird builds a nest in a hollow in the ground, often beside a clump of dirt or tuft of grass. She lays two to five eggs and incubates these for about 11 days. Both parents feed the nestlings, which fledge after eight to ten days. Some subspecies of horned lark breed two or three times in a season, but it is not known if streaked horned larks in British Columbia raised more than one brood per season.

Habitat

Streaked horned larks are found in short-grass habitats and areas with bare ground, including spits, estuaries, sand dunes and Garry oak meadows, as well as some modified areas such as pastures, playing fields, airports and roadsides. Nests are generally built in open, barren areas that are sparsely vegetated or have very short vegetation.

Prior to European settlement, natural and human-induced fires helped to maintain the open habitat required by grassland birds. Agricultural clearing by early settlers may have increased local habitat for streaked horned larks by creating additional open spaces.

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Why the species is at risk

Streaked horned larks are the rarest subspecies of horned lark in Canada. This subspecies was probably never abundant in British Columbia, and the loss of breeding and foraging habitat has further reduced the small population. Habitat loss has occurred because of the conversion of grasslands and sparsely vegetated areas to residential, recreational and industrial uses. Other former habitats have become unsuitable because they have been structurally altered as a result of fire suppression, which has allowed shrub and tree encroachment, and because of invasion by non-native vegetation such as Scotch broom* (*Cytisus scoparius*), gorse* (*Ulex europaeus*), Himalayan blackberry* (*Rubus discolor*) and tall non-native grasses. Direct impacts of human activities have also contributed to the population decline. While streaked horned larks can tolerate some grazing and occasional use of agricultural machinery, accidental destruction of nests by mowing, tilling and trampling is of great concern for this rare subspecies. Many known breeding sites are at active airports, where grass-cutting during breeding season has destroyed nests. Streaked horned larks have also been killed as a result of the spraying of insecticides on farmlands. Cats and other predators are further reducing the tiny population.

What you can do to help this species

Management practices should be tailored to the needs of this species and its habitat. Potential management tools will depend on the specific circumstances and may require experimentation prior to implementation. **Before taking any action, expert advice should be obtained, and no action taken without it. Please refer to the introductory section of this manual.**

Efforts to protect grassland habitats and remove invasive species may benefit streaked horned larks as well as other rare grassland birds. Care should be taken to avoid the use of insecticides in areas that may be used for foraging or nesting, particularly during the breeding season. Sightings of this bird should be reported to the Conservation Data Centre in Victoria (srmwww.gov.bc.ca/cdc), especially if there is evidence of breeding activity. Unfortunately, little else can be done for this subspecies unless breeding populations are established in British Columbia. If a breeding population is discovered, its habitat should be protected through land securement or stewardship.

References

Beauchesne, S.M. and J.M. Cooper. 2002. Draft COSEWIC status report on Streaked Horned Lark *Eremophila alpestris strigata*. Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada, Ottawa, Ontario.

For further information, contact the Garry Oak Ecosystems Recovery Team, or see the web site at: www.goert.ca.

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*Refers to non-native species.