



The Official Newsletter  
of the  
Kansas Ornithological Society

## The Horned Lark

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RECYCLED PAPER

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### NOTICE TO NEWSLETTER CONTRIBUTORS

Because of the early date for the fall meeting, it is extremely important that information for the August edition of The Horned Lark be received by the editor no later than August 5, 1991. This includes all Fall Meeting information and registration information and seasonal bird reports. Any other information desired to be included in the August issue should also be received by that date.

### KOS IS PLEASED TO WELCOME 42 NEW MEMBERS SINCE JANUARY 1, 1991:

Don Alley, Kansas City, KS; Philip Balch, Linn; Shelby Birch, Overland Park; Diane Bythell, Lawrence; Dan Baffa, Garden City; Scott Coleman, Manhattan; N.R. Emmert, Holton; Craig Fannes, Grand Island, NE; Luisa Fenton, Wichita; David Fischer, Olathe; Marilyn Hampson, Paola; Shanon Haraughty, Manhattan; George Hecht, Lawrence; Jane Koska, Kansas City, KS; Steve and Margaret Linderer, Larned; Beverly Maxey, Valley Center; Edwin Miller, Independence; Nancy Miller, Prairie Village; Dwight Moore, Emporia; Craig Olawsky, Emporia; Carol Olson, Eureka; W. David Pantle, Denver, CO; Tom Payne, Stilwell; Jack Revare, Shawnee Mission; Mike Reynolds, Shawnee; Karyn Baker Riney, Lawrence; Shannon Rothchild, Emporia; Robert Rucker, Las Vegas, NV; David Sampson, Marysville; Tim Schallberg, Kansas City, MO; Dawn Sharp, Lawrence; Kay Sims, Scott City; Barbara Slover, Wichita; Jerrod Soukup, Newton; Michael Speers, Larned; Gary Straley, Winfield; Don and Mary Trayer, Murdock; Maure Weigel, Brookville; Margaret Wedge, David Williams, Jeff Witters, all of Lawrence; Benjamin Young, Manhattan.

### 1991 KOS MEMBERSHIP DIRECTORY:

By now, all KOS members should have in their hands a copy of the 1991 KOS Membership Directory. Of course, given the rate at which the average person changes address, this directory is already out of date! Please help the Membership Committee keep this information current by notifying either Diane Seltman or Galen Pittman with any changes or corrections. A special note to you Life Members out there, since we don't hear from you on a regular basis, i.e. annual renewal cards, we may have outdated information. Please let us know if you're still out there! Thank you for your help.

MY 1990 BIRDING BIG YEAR IN KANSAS - by Galen L. Pittman

This story actually starts sometime in 1989. I had often heard that the Kansas big year record was 300 exactly and had been set in 1985 by Scott Seltman. When I sent in my totals for the American Birding Association's (ABA) annual listing report, I noticed that my Kansas lifelist total of 303 (1988) was not very competitive, but I had at least broken the first major barrier, i. e. 300, yet that was just three more than the one year record! My best Kansas year list total, however, was not too impressive. So, 1989 was my chance to improve on my previous Kansas year lists. To make a long story short, I ended up 1989 with 282 and my Kansas lifelist was at 319. As it turned out, 282 was good enough for the highest (ABA reported) Kansas annual list in 1989. This success spurred me on to make a run for the elusive 300 plateau (only achieved once previously). Little did I know what I was getting in for, nor did I expect 1990 to be as good a birding year as it ultimately was.

I started out 1990 by birding at my home near Lawrence and within about a 15 mile radius of there. I added 27 species to my list the first day, most of which were typical winter birds. In the next several days I added four species and set out on the first of many extended weekend birding trips to western Kansas. I participated in the Scott County and Cedar Bluff Christmas Counts and, upon returning, had 60 year birds including some nice western species, such as Ferruginous Hawk, Merlin, Black-billed Magpie, Townsend's Solitaire, Bewick's Wren, Golden Eagle, Mountain Bluebird and Northern Shrike. The rest of January was fairly predictable and by the end of the month my year total was 78. The first two-thirds of February was again very typical for northeastern Kansas and I added seven species; however, a Turkey Vulture on 13 February was, perhaps, an omen of things to come. Between 25 February and 2 March, I made another western Kansas jaunt. I went to Clark County to visit my parents and, while visiting, found time to go birding and even made it all the way to Elkhart for a whistle stop. After returning to Lawrence my year list was at 99, and I had snagged a couple of very good year birds, Northern Saw-whet Owl at Clark State Fishing Lake and Steller's Jay at the Satanta city park.

Mid-March marked the beginning of the true year bird chasing. I had almost missed the Gyrfalcon at Cheyenne Bottoms Wildlife Area (CBWA) because, unbeknownst to me, my telephone was out of order! Many dozens of birders had gone to the Bottoms that weekend and several of my birding friends had tried to call me to see if I wanted to go try for it. I learned of the sighting almost by accident and managed to make a solo trip on Monday morning, the 12th, and was apparently one of the last people to see it! The end of March marked the close of the first winter season of 1990 and the beginning of the long awaited spring season with a year total of 121. My March 1989 total was 113 and that is where the similarity starts to fade.

By the end of April 1990 my year total had bulged to 216 (95 added in the month of April). I knew by late April that something extraordinary was in the making. My April 1989 split was 161, so by April 1990 my total of 175 was running nicely ahead of the 1989 pace. However, the 1990 Jayhawk Audubon Society Birdathon was scheduled for 28 April and a Big Day was planned to start at Marais des Cygnes Wildlife Area (MCWA) and end at Quivira National Wildlife Refuge (QNWA) in one 24 hour period. My birdathon weekend species total was over 160 and I added 41 year birds! Admittedly, April 1990 was padded by a Big Day in May, so of course, you would expect the April total to be greater in 1990. But, don't forget, I had surpassed the 1989 April split by 14 before the birdathon. Of course, what happened in May is the rest of the story.

May was the month of state birds for me. During May, I racked up 12 new state birds and on five occasions got doubles--two state birds on one day! I strategically planned to take two weeks of vacation from 30 April to 11 May and it really paid off.

On May 1st I found myself in Cherokee County near Galena and added 10 year birds and two state birds, Fish Crow and Yellow-throated Warbler. The Spring KOS meeting in Morton County was next on the agenda and a five day weekend trip was arranged. The weekend in Elkhart and stops coming and going at CBWA and QNWR produced five state and a total of 32 year birds. Highlights of that trip were Lesser Prairie Chicken, Mountain Plover, Piping Plover, Whimbrel, Ruddy Turnstone, Sanderling, Barn Owl, Cassin's Sparrow, Scaled Quail, Scrub Jay, Mountain Chickadee, Curve-billed Thrasher, Worm-eating Warbler, Hooded Warbler, Virginia's Warbler, McGillivray's Warbler, Western Tanager, Lazuli Bunting and Bobolink. Upon returning from southwest Kansas, I wasn't going to let up, so on 11 May I found a Veery and a Golden-winged Warbler right at home in the Lawrence Riverfront Park. On Mother's Day (13 May) I gathered in seven more year birds by birding Linn and Johnson Counties. Highlights of the Mother's Day expedition were Acadian Flycatcher, Yellow-throated Vireo, Chestnut-sided Warbler, Blackburnian Warbler and Olivaceous Cormorant. The last two weeks of May netted a Willow Flycatcher at Fort Leavenworth, a Yellow-bellied Flycatcher at Mill Creek Park in Johnson County, an Alder Flycatcher and Olive-sided Flycatcher at my own house, a Western Grebe at Lake Perry, and a Least Tern at the Kaw Valley Fish Farm north of Lawrence. All in all, quite the incredible spring migration in Kansas. It was so good, as a matter of fact, that I recorded 266 species during the months of April and May alone (95% of the year's total by then)! After the month of May had ended with only two species needed to crack my previous personal best of 282, I was, to say the least, optimistic.

The months of June and July proved to be long and arduous, though fruitful, for finding new year birds. The breeding season was filled with several long distance, as well as seven or eight local tries, for Cerulean Warbler to no avail, one of the year's biggest misses. I managed to add eight year birds, but no state birds for those two months. The highlight of this period was a trip to QNMR on 23 June, when I tallied four year birds, Common Moorhen, Common Tern, Black-billed Cuckoo and Least Bittern.

With the start of August, mercifully, the breeding season was drawing to a close and with the shorebird, hummingbird and flycatcher migration bearing down, I chose to keep going back to the well and head for Morton County again with, of course, the obligatory stopover at QNWR and CBWA. A four day weekend trip (4-6 August) produced four year birds, including one state bird, Brewer's Sparrow. Another weekend trip to Morton County from 24 to 26 August produced six year birds, including Ruff (at QNWR), Ladder-backed Woodpecker, Western Wood-Pewee and my only state triple of the year! On 25 August I recorded Rufous Hummingbird, Hammond's Flycatcher and Dusky Flycatcher, which brought my year total up to a tantalizing 299 with a full third of the year to go! This Big Year strategy was working so well, I pulled a move that even I don't believe. I managed back-to-back weekend trips to Morton County. The strategy was a good one, however, because on September 1 I recorded #300, a Buff-breasted Sandpiper, and #301, a Black-chinned Hummingbird, both at Liberal. And, just to ice the cake, the next day in Morton County brought me my sixth state double, Cordilleran Flycatcher and Cassin's Kingbird. The remainder of September netted three more year birds, all of which were state birds, a Red Phalarope at Elkhart on the 16th (yes, another trip), an Anna's Hummingbird at Oxford on the 22nd and a Black-throated Blue Warbler on the 28th in Jefferson County.

Since I was entering the final quarter of the year with my initial goal accomplished (my year list stood at 306), you might think I would just cruise on in to the finish. However, I wasn't the only Kansas birder having a good year! There were at least four other birders that I was aware of who had a good shot at also topping 300. My thoughts turned to---"let's see just how high we can push this new record!" My final Big Year tally depended on the remainder of the fall migration and the quality of early winter residents that may show up. Certainly, the strategy was clear, bird the large eastern reservoirs as often as I could, make it to Morton























