



The Horned Lark

613 Tamerisk, Junction City, KS 66441-3359

September 1993

Vol. 20, No. 3

This newsletter is printed on recycled paper.

DO YOU ENJOY THE HOTLINE?

There's no doubt that a lot of us use the KOS Rare Bird Alert on a fairly regular basis. That's what makes it work! We go birding, we call in our good birds, Scott posts them on the Hotline, and we all go back out looking for more good birds, or the birds that someone else has seen.

But just like everything else it costs to keep this service going. There's phone line charges, plus the expense of keeping the occasionally temperamental answering machines answering and talking. So far donations to the Hotline Fund have been able to cover most of the costs associated with the Hotline. Oh, you didn't know there was a Hotline Fund? Well, it may not be called exactly that, but I'm an editor not a treasurer.

Anyway, if you are one of those who use it on a regular basis (like I do) then why not help support it. Go ahead and post reports about good birds you've seen while birding. More than likely not everything you post will make it onto the report, but it helps us know what's going on around the state. Secondly, show how much you appreciate the Hotline and pull out your checkbook and send a donation marked **KOS Hotline** to: *Rose Fritz, KOS Treasurer, 1816 Cypress Lane, Newton, KS 67114.*

By the way we're not the only state that has a Rare Bird Alert. In fact there are many Hotlines around the country. If you are interested in a particular location and what hotlines are available give me a call or drop me a line and I'll let you know what's available in that area.

ARE YOU INTERESTED IN . . . ?

From time to time the KOS Board receives requests from other birdwatching and ornithology

associations and/or magazines asking for our membership list. The KOS Board has taken the position that KOS members should feel that they are "safe" from being bombarded by other groups looking for memberships or subscriptions and therefore do not supply our membership list to other groups. When possible we try to post a notice in the *Horned Lark* about some of these opportunities. But we can't possibly hope to cover all the bases.

If you are trying to find out how to contact a particular association or magazine please drop me a note and I will get you the information IF it exists. For example there is a newly forming group called the Backyard Birding Association from somewhere "back east". I'm still gathering information on that one and will pass it on when I get it. So if you're interested, remember that it never hurts to ask!

TIME TO START PLANNING FOR THOSE CHRISTMAS COUNTS!

Believe it or not it's time to start thinking about those Christmas Bird Counts. Especially if you happen to be a compiler! I know some of you compilers tend to wait until the last minute to set your date to see what the weather may be like, which may explain why you only have 4 people make it to your count. The next issue of the *Horned Lark* will be coming out in early December and, like last year, I would like to have as complete a listing as possible of the Kansas (and nearby) Christmas Bird Counts.

To get those included I need to have the information for your count by Thanksgiving. All I need is the name of your count, the date of your count, where to meet, and the name of the compiler/organizer and where they can be reached. Do your part and make the plans, and I'll get notice out to the members! Send those cards and letters to: *Chuck Otte, KOS Editor, 613 Tamerisk, Junction City, KS 66441, or FAX# 913-238-7166.*

Special Species . . .

Painted Bunting

by Chuck Otte

I can remember as a young boy of 4 or 5 riding out to the fields with my mother while she took lunch or a coffee break to my father. My mom always took her bird book and "field glasses" with her just in case something showed up while she was out there. I remember that the bird book was one of the earlier Peterson Western editions with the plates scattered throughout the book.

I would spend hours on end going through the book and looking at the pictures. I dearly loved the page of the hummingbirds, all lined up in rows, the bright males at the top of the page and the drabish, but still fascinating, females at the bottom. That any bird could have such colors amazed me. (And people wonder why I became a bird watcher!)

I also remember the first time my mother and I saw an Indigo Bunting. A blue that was just incredible beyond belief and how could so much sound come out of such a little bird. Several years later my wife, Jaye, and I would have the fortune to come upon our first Lazuli Bunting in southern Idaho at a rest stop built among an old lava flow. We heard this incredible song that had a familiar ring to it. We eventually tracked down the source of that song to find it belonged to a sprightly male Lazuli Bunting.

As we checked our references and learned a little more about the Lazuli Bunting I realized how much I wanted to see a Painted Bunting. That combination of brilliant, nearly gaudy colors, reminded me in many ways of those hummingbirds I had spent hours observing as a youth.

Before that month was out Jaye and I would have the good fortune to discover Painted Buntings virtually out our back door, on Walla Walla Road just northwest of Junction City, where we have found them every year since.

A male Painted Bunting (*Passerina ciris*) is nearly impossible to miss or to mistake for anything else. The orangish-red of the belly and rump glows like a fireball when it catches the morning light. In fact, that first one we saw I tried to turn into an oriole from a distance. But the indigo-blue head and the green back quickly separate the Painted Bunting from any other Kansas species.

The female and young males seem drab in comparison, but the bright green that predominates their plumage is still quite distinctive. A first spring male in Oklahoma this spring gave us a go for a while, but most doubts were removed when he sang.

The song of the Painted Bunting is best summed up by saying that it is very "bunting like." I like to describe it as a languid warbling, with a very thin sweet quality, but without the paired phrases that I associate with the Indigo Bunting. It is often the song that we identify first and then follow to the find the singer sitting atop a fairly high perch from which he can defend his territory.

Painted Buntings prefer what I would call scrubby/brushy locations. The areas around Junction City where we find them have a good mix of dogwood and sumac bushes, medium sized junipers and scattered larger deciduous trees interspersed with open grassy areas. Painted Buntings are primarily seed eaters. Thompson and Ely indicate that they appear to be quite fond of foxtail seed (they should be doing well this year!).

The Painted Bunting is common to uncommon in southeastern Kansas, becoming less plentiful as you travel north and west in the state. Extreme western records in Kansas are from Stevens County in the south and Sherman County to the north. They have been conspicuously absent from the northernmost tier of counties all across the Nebraska border. There are breeding records for as far west as Clark County and as far north as Riley County. Based on behavior and activity, I am sure that they are a Geary County breeder though I have yet to find a nest.

I usually expect to see Painted Buntings by Mother's Day in May. In fact this year I had one in very late April, and there was a report from Russell County of a male Painted Bunting at a feeder on May 6. By mid-August I have very little luck in finding them, and Thompson and Ely report a late date of September 21st. There are also a couple of winter feeder records from Reno and Douglas Counties.

Painted Buntings are probably more abundant than we realize, but unless we happen to catch them singing from their perches in the morning they are easy to miss. Spend a little time learning their song, then take the time to start checking those scrubby hillsides in the southeastern half of the state. You will probably be surprised one day when a flash of hummingbird colors lands on top of a hedge tree and gives you that first breathtaking look at a rainbow on the wing—a Painted Bunting!

