

MINUTES

In Attendance

American Bird Conservancy: Bob Altman; City of Portland: Dave Helzer, Claire Puchy; McChord Air Force Base: Valerie Elliott; OR Dept of Fish and Wildlife: Susan Barnes, Ann Kreager; Oregon State University: Randy Moore; Port of Portland: Nick Atwell, Dana Green; Portland Audubon: Mary Coolidge; Portland Metro: Elaine Stewart, Paul Vandenburg; Natural Resources Conservation Service: Rachel Maggi; The Nature Conservancy: Hannah Anderson; US Army Corps of Engineers: Paul Schmidt; US Fish and Wildlife Service: Cat Brown, Jodi Bush, Miel Corbet, Jeff Dillon, Kim Flotlin, Paul Meyers, Bill Ritchie; WA Dept of Fish and Wildlife: Mary Linders, Scott Pearson, Derek Stinson, Michelle Tirhi.

Announcements

- Scott Pearson announced that 2 **lark publications** will be out soon:
 - 1) Camfield, Martin, & Pearson – comparing vital rates of alpine vs streaked horned larks. They report a lambda of 0.6, suggesting a 40% decline per year, but actual observed decline is less than that, something like 10-20% decline. Population modeling is a useful tool that may not be the actual lambda rate, but the direction of decline perhaps.
 - 2) Journal of Wildlife Mgmt paper suggesting how to best affect lark survival rates and outlined management recommendations.
- Streaked horned larks were featured in **Oregon Field Guide** on Oregon Public Broadcasting. See our very own Randy Moore and Dave Helzer.
<http://www.opb.org/programs/ofg/videos/view/320-Streakedhorn-Lark>
- Mark Your Calendars for the Cascadia Prairie-Oak Partnership **Ecoregional Science Conference** – March 24-27, 2010, Centralia WA. We are partnering with Northwest Scientific Association for their annual meeting. There will be sessions and symposia focused on prairie/oak woodland topics spanning the entire ecoregion from Willamette to BC.

Action Items

Below are the action items identified during the meeting discussions and during the action planning process. These items are listed here to draw attention to them. They are also listed in the text of the minutes.

**** Action** – All leads for priority tasks in the plan will provide a ballpark estimate of needed funds to implement those tasks.

**** Action** - Smaller group led by Scott Pearson will decide where to focus 2010 lark exclosure work in WA. Potentials include Olympia airport, Ledbetter HRA, Damon Point, Fort Lewis.

**** Action** - Randy Moore is leading creation of draft technical bulletin for NRCS. There was a lot learned this year about what to do on agricultural land. The bulletin will be done by the end of the year.

**** Action** – Nick Atwell will coordinate with Scott Pearson and Burke museum to get tissue sample to Smithsonian.

**** Action** – Form a Monitoring Sub-Committee to finalize draft range-wide monitoring protocol and develop a comparable survey protocol for occupied sites.

**** Action** – Regarding surveying new and historic sites

- * Cat Brown and Jeff Dillon will talk with Tualatin FWS Refuge about having them include larks in their surveys.

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**** Action** – Hannah will lead formation of an Airport Subcommittee to develop and structure the workshop series.

On-the-Ground 2009 Updates & Plans for 2010 Season

- Nest Enclosures in OR & WA - *Scott Pearson, Randy Moore, Bill Ritchie, Hannah Anderson*

Oregon – 20 nest enclosures at Finley and Corvallis airport, with some interesting and promising initial results. 9 enclosed nests fledged, 11 failed. 3 to 4 of that 11 failed due to weather and drowning. American kestrel predation inside enclosures seemed to be a problem. 1 enclosed nest with adults killed on the nests. One American kestrel male did go through the enclosure and go after nest. Do have it on film. No nests were abandoned due to enclosures. But several abandoned for “mystery” reasons. Likely was abandoned due to kestrel perching on enclosures. To resolve the problem they will be putting up anti-perching mesh.

Washington – 2 sites at Ledbetter HRA and 13th Division Prairie on Fort Lewis.

The Ledbetter restoration area is approximately 121 acres, historically occupied by larks, but they blinked out, then came back when it was restored with oyster shell for snowy plovers. At Ledbetter, 3 lark nests were located, every other was enclosed resulting in 2 enclosures. At the 1st enclosed nests there were 2 eggs, one hatched and one disappeared. Unknown what happened to the other. Have not quantified the problem yet, but the elk are licking the enclosures from the salt, which could explain lark and snowy plover abandonment. The unenclosed nest hatched 3 birds, and the 3rd enclosed nest had 3 nestlings. These were presumably successful. At the entire site, there were 10 or 12 territories, but only those 3 nests located. Did have some areas to investigate more next year that are in a matrix of vegetated beach grass with pockets of openings and there seem to be larks occurring there regularly, but has not been surveyed thoroughly. Did observe at least 2 hatch year birds where the nests were never found, but did know there were territories.

13th Division – Eleven nests from 5 Streaked Horned Lark (STHL) pairs were found. In addition, another breeding pair was likely, but none of their nests were ever found. 14 STHL were banded and fledged from the 11 known nests with an additional 3-7 unbanded fledglings from undiscovered nests. Three of the pairs' territories were along the Pacemaker airstrip, one was in the recently burned southwest corner of the site, and one was west of the apron between Pacemaker and the western site boundary road. The undiscovered nesting location was hypothesized to be somewhere between these last two territories. 6 of the 11 nests found in the 2009 breeding season were exclosed. Although the experimental design called for exclosure of every other nest, this was not always possible. Nests that were built adjacent to roads or discovered in an advanced stage of brooding were not exclosed. Consequently, one pair (North Apron Pair) had three nests exclosed, while three other pairs had one nest apiece exclosed. Out of the two STHL nests predated, one of these was under an exclosure. Western Meadowlarks appeared to be the predators in both cases of depredated nests: eggs with 0.5cm holes were found and one small chick was killed but not eaten. Although full statistical analyses have not yet been performed, STHL predation rates for the 2009 breeding season are much lower when compared to other ground nesting species on the 13th Division Prairie. An even 50% (11 out of 22) nests of Savannah Sparrows, Common Nighthawks, Western Meadowlarks, and Killdeer were depredated, compared to just 2 out of 11 depredated STHL nests (18%). Egg Hatchability: Of the 28 STHL eggs that were not predated during incubation, only 18 hatched (64%). When compared to a hatch rate of 88% (38 of 43) for the other 4 species, it would appear that STHL egg hatchability is a serious concern at 13th Division Prairie.

Plans for next season include hiring a dedicated observer to do lark nest monitoring and exclosure placement in Washington.

**** Action Item** - Smaller group led by Scott Pearson will decide where to focus lark exclosure work in WA. Potentials include Olympia airport, Ledbetter HRA, Damon Point, Fort Lewis.

- Habitat Restoration Trials on Columbia River Islands - *Hannah Anderson*

In March 2009, the Army Corps of Engineers and TNC (funded by USFWS) initiated some trial restoration plots in unsuitable habitat at historic or occupied sites along the lower Columbia River. The plots were not all equal in shape / size, but are approximately 300m² each. A tractor pulling an 8-foot disk implemented 3 treatments and one control in areas that were identified through the previous habitat analysis as too dense. Most of these areas were covered by quite thick moss. The treatments included one pass with the disk, two passes of the disk, strip passes of the disk, and no disking. We surveyed the plots for larks three times each throughout the season. We did observe birds foraging in the plots. One of the observations was a hatch-year bird. Anecdotally it appears that the plots where we have observed lark use are adjacent to known suitable habitat. Adjacency may be a very important component.

We also took vegetation data in the plots for comparison with known lark suitability data. The data have not yet been analyzed.

In addition to the plot monitoring, we did occupancy surveys at 10 sites in the lower Columbia. We had a lot of help from volunteering partners, many from the working group, as well as boat assistance from Pat Miller at WDFW and Paul Meyers & Bill Ritchie at USFWS. Thank you All!

The occupancy and plot surveys are funded and planned to occur in 2010. The table below is an off-the-cuff summary of where we located breeding and wintering larks in 2009. A more thorough mid-project progress report is forthcoming.

Site	Feb / March 2009		May / June / July 2009	
	Surveyed	Larks Observed	Surveyed	Larks Observed
Rice Island	No	-	Yes	Yes
Miller Sands Spit	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Pillar Rock Sands	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Welch Island	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Tenasillahee	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
White's (Brown's) Island	No	-	Yes	Yes
Wallace Island	Yes	No	Yes	Yes ¹
Crims Island	No	-	Yes	Yes
Cottonwood Island	No	-	Yes	No
Sandy Island	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

¹ Suspect that this was a flyover from White's island, and not breeding on Wallace.

- Oregon Breeding Monitoring - Randy Moore

Breeding monitoring in Oregon was conducted from top of the valley to almost the bottom. They monitored some specific sites in Multnomah, Polk, Benton and Lynn counties, and in the southern half of the Willamette. There were 310 nests monitored, which results in a very good sample size. They estimate approximately 260 pairs, so there are over 500 birds on those 5 sites. Interesting to note that they documented one pair to have 5 nesting attempts. Breeding started in the beginning of May and the last nest fledged on August 28th, which is late in the extreme. W. Valley birds have a similar phenology as those in WA, and are usually done in July.

Multnomah – apparently has 7 to 9 breeding pairs at sites that we already knew about - the SW quad of PDX and Rivergate industrial site. In addition they surveyed west Hayden island, Sauvie island, sandy river delta, and St. John's landfill. Did find one flyover lark on Sauvie Island, very likely a migrant. Also surveyed Government island. The Rivergate population had remarkably good breeding success, found all (minus 1 or 2) nests, had 100% nest success. Suspect that the industrial areas may be good because the predator community is undeveloped. Likely 2 pairs nesting at SW quad, did not find any nests, but did find 2 fledged young. Private land on Sauvie island agriculture may have good potential but not good grass habitat.

They monitored all 3 mid-Willamette refuges for rep success. There are 13 pairs at Ankney, 50 pairs at Basket Slough (about 20 2 years before), about 40 pairs at Finley. All 3 had a significant increase in the number of larks, which had to do with the way they are farmed. The farming varies greatly from year to year as all the refuges are managed for goose forage and turned over to local farmers during the growing season. Rep success at B-S poor, Finley was better where they were doing active mgmt. There were no birds in restoration site at wet prairie, apparently that field has undergone succession so that it is no longer suitable. They plan to burn this year.

Corvallis airport, about 80 pairs this year – success was higher than it was last year. Had a much more extensive video monitoring project going on this year. The suite of predators in WV is much greater than we had previously known. Last year all predation events were northern harriers, this year added great horned owl, red tail hawk, crows, a species of mouse, and kestrels. All avian predators. No meadowlark, and there is a robust population at Corvallis airport. Has fantastic great-horned owl predation.

Wetland Reserve Program in southern Linn county, called NDAC, hosted about 75 pairs of larks in its first year post-restoration, and about 75 pairs this year, which was surprising due to the succession that was occurring. Looking at it from the road, thought it was too thick, but once you got there, it was thin enough. But birds were abandoning by later in the season. As part of the restoration, they have created 8 big wetland impoundments. As these draw down, the birds move out of the “succeeded” upland prairie into the dried up areas, cracked clay. Have learned a lot this year and will inform the technical bulletin for NRCS. So birds will use wetlands themselves after there is no longer water in it. They plan to burn NDAC this year.

**** Action Item** - Tualatin National Wildlife Refuge may be a good place for surveys next year. Elaine from Portland Metro suggested that the Tualatin WRP complex of sites may be a good site to manage for streaked horned larks. Metro is looking to pull together and OF grant to manage their prairie habitat for larks.

Randy is interested in continuing the OR breeding monitoring in 2010 to ensure multiple years and multiple seasons.

- St. John’s Landfill Restoration and Attraction - Paul Vandenburg

St. John’s has a 5-acre lark restoration plot that is composed of dredge material, that is now quite green. They do have a large landscape effect on the small spot. They are very close to the Rivergate field where construction is progressing (about 55 acres left). Metro is actively managing the plot now for suitable nesting habitat. They disked the plot in September 2009, and had previously done some herbicide treatment. Hannah and Scott came down in late summer and discussed the potential to set up a vocal attraction. Many partners and volunteers collaborated to get the attraction project set up. Thank you to Americorps, Trevor’s Woodworking, TNC, WDFW, OSU, USFWS and Portland Metro. The assumption for the project is that the visual decoy is important but not too important how good they are, but just that the pattern is correct.

The attraction boxes and decoys were set up in early September. The current plan is to leave them out until mid-October and then put them back in February. Will do it at least through nest spring or go for another year. Vocalizations run 3 times per day for about an hour. The site is monitored for larks about 3 times per week.

Q: why are the boxes/decoys to be taken out of the field in October? The thought was that the birds would be prospecting in early autumn and then again moving through in the spring. Randy agrees those are productive times to be doing it, but adds that it would be worthwhile to leave it there over the course of the winter. There will be wintering birds very near by. When the sun comes out, they do sing throughout the winter. There is a propensity for birds to breed where they winter. So

attracting birds during the winter may be a good thing. Getting the Rivergate birds to find that place during the winter may be a key to getting them to establish. An alternative to leaving them out all winter would be to move the boxes out there during a sun breaks and good winter weather. Larks are known to sing even in the winter when the sun comes out.

Policy & Incentive Updates

- St. John's Landfill CCAA - Cat Brown

USFWS and Portland Metro are in the process of completing the CCAA (Candidate Conservation Agreement with Assurances), which they expect will be done in spring of 2010. The CCAA is like an HCP but for candidate instead of listed species. It is basically an agreement with USFWS where they outline management activities for the property. Should the covered species become listed in the future the landowner will not be required to do anything additional beyond what they had already agreed to. USFWS issues a take permit, which allows the signatory to do the beneficial actions for the species without being dinged for it later.

This CCAA is a good model that could be related other places. Randy has been in discussion with the City of Corvallis to create a CCAA for city property. The City is willing to discuss potentials. Cat and Randy had a discussion about creating a CCAA for the Corvallis Airport. This will be quite complicated because it will involve the FAA.

- NRCS Incentive Programs and STHL Technical Bulletin - Rachel Maggi

**** Action Item:** Randy Moore is creating the draft technical bulletin. There was a lot learned this year about what to do on agricultural land. The bulletin will be done by the end of the year.

Rachel explained that all NRCS incentive programs are based off of state payment schedules. NRCS has to get larks into the payment schedule, which is already complete in WA for 2010. They will need to develop a "practice scenario" that would tell landowners what to do.

The ephemeral nature of lark land use could be extraordinarily important as it wouldn't require landowners to permanently take their land out of production, but could just let it lie fallow for a year or two. Specifically, the EQIP program is directed to target organic producers, which would require a 2-5 year transition process from traditional agricultural production to organic production. Some of the practices that benefit larks could be perfect for that transition.

Portland Metro has a lot of agricultural property that could be a good link.

Rachel mentions that the new restrictions on WHIP have been relaxed. Under the new farm bill WHIP still only applies to private land, but instead of being only active agricultural land, the land can be suitable for agriculture or able to produce trees.

Airports

- **McChord - Valerie Elliott**

Surveys were conducted in 2009, but it is suspected that the observers were too inexperienced to create useful data. The past breeding stronghold area is no longer there. Valerie suspects that there are more crows out there than before. A falconer regularly hazes birds on runways. McChord is scheduled to join bases with Fort Lewis in 2010. McChord holds an air rodeo that often is held right in the middle of the breeding season.

- **Olympia Airport - Michelle Tirhi**

Consistent surveys were initiated in 2009. Surveys were conducted in May and June. The airport is estimated to be occupied by 20-some pairs. The population goal at the airport was set at 18-30 pairs with greater than or equal to 30% reproductive success. Rep success was not monitored, although one nest was discovered opportunistically while doing the surveys.

WDFW is in consultation with the Port of Olympia on both 5-year and 20-year management plans. The straw-dog plan includes directives to do lark surveys. All this is being run through the FAA, who has a very strong voice. One of the goals in the management plan is to get funding directed toward lark breeding monitoring.

- **PDX – Dana Green, Nick Atwell**

The issue for PDX is strategic land use planning. Do they dedicate a specific piece of property or create ephemeral habitat across the inventory. They are talking with the city, but cannot do anything until they have discussions at the federal level. PDX wonders how CCA discussions would go with the FAA.

- **Larks and Airports Workshop - Hannah Anderson**

Interested in conducting a workshop that will address airport specific issues for larks and work together to find positive solutions, dispel misconceptions, etc.

**** Action Item** – Hannah will connect with Dana and Nick to talk about topics, structure, agenda, and speakers for the workshop.

- **BASH information - Nick Atwell**

Between 1990 and 2009 in Washington and Oregon combined, horned larks account for 17 of 3088 (0.55%) reported strikes. See **Appendix A** for nationwide counts and details on Oregon strikes.

This topic led to discussion that the Smithsonian needs a tissue sample for STHL. Scott mentions that they can get samples on loan from the Burke museum. And Scott has some in his freezer.

**** Action Item** – Nick Atwell will coordinate with Scott Pearson and Burke museum to get tissue sample to Smithsonian.

Range-Wide Monitoring Protocol

Due to time limitations, rather than holding a discussion about the particulars of the draft range-wide monitoring protocol produced by Randy Moore, it was decided that better use of the group's time would be to discuss whether a range-wide monitoring is necessary.

The idea behind the draft monitoring protocol is that it would be a vehicle to estimate how many larks there are total, but also a repeatable protocol to monitor the population. It was written with the knowledge that you can probably get a decent idea of how the species is faring on public lands and in places where there is annually available habitat (sites that have a breeding presence each year) as opposed to ephemeral habitat within the rest of the Valley. We can monitor the stable sites, and then know how those birds are doing, but won't know what is happening other places.

It is likely that the populations of the core sites are going to be the highest populations in the valley. There are 500 point count stations that have been run in the valley (no systematic design) but did provide a substantial effort at roadside sites. Numbers of larks from that effort pales in comparison to "core" sites.

While the group agreed that knowing absolutely the number of birds in the population would be good, it may not be the best use of limited conservation dollars. What we do know is that no matter what the final count would be, it would be too low.

Q: what does FWS need to support the listing decision making process? They use the best available knowledge. There is always limited funds, and limited qualified people to do the work. A certain population number will not likely influence listing priority or likelihood of listing.

**** Action Item:** It was decided that because the protocol was close to completion and would not take too much effort to finalize it, a subcommittee of the working group, the Monitoring Subcommittee, would finalize the protocol so that if funding becomes available it would be ready to implement.

Lark Population Target

Bob Altman brought up the topic of setting a population target for STHL that will stimulate greater conservation action. The value of setting the target is not necessarily for every audience, but would provide context to have a better understanding of the value of their actions. A 5-year objective gives people and entities something to reference in that their actions contribute toward achieving a goal.

A lively discussion ensued, resulting in the group agreeing to set the goal to **double the number of larks in 5-years**.

Action Planning

The group worked to focus and refine the draft action plan, which is attached as a separate document and embedded here as **Appendix B**. Some specific action items resulting from the discussion are listed below.

**** Action Item:** All leads for priority tasks in the plan will provide a ballpark estimate of needed funds to implement those tasks.

**** Action Item:** Form a Monitoring Sub-Committee to finalize draft range-wide monitoring protocol and develop a comparable survey protocol for occupied sites.

**** Action Item:** Regarding surveying new and historic sites

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- * Randy will provide information from Port of Portland regarding Longview deposition sites

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Appendix A

Species	State	Strikes	Total State Strikes	% of total
HORNED LARK	ALABAMA	8	910	0.88%
HORNED LARK	ARKANSAS	5	532	0.94%
HORNED LARK	ARIZONA	53	1638	3.24%
HORNED LARK	CALIFORNIA	66	8341	0.79%
HORNED LARK	COLORADO	384	3231	11.88%
HORNED LARK	CONNECTICUT	36	964	3.73%
HORNED LARK	DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA	4	2026	0.20%
HORNED LARK	DELAWARE	1	184	0.54%
HORNED LARK	FLORIDA	3	6156	0.05%
HORNED LARK	GEORGIA	5	1617	0.31%
HORNED LARK	IOWA	13	782	1.66%
HORNED LARK	IDAHO	7	285	2.46%
HORNED LARK	ILLINOIS	8	4373	0.18%
HORNED LARK	INDIANA	16	1263	1.27%
HORNED LARK	KANSAS	6	401	1.50%
HORNED LARK	KENTUCKY	6	2282	0.26%
HORNED LARK	LOUISIANA	9	2545	0.35%
HORNED LARK	MASSACHUSETTS	39	1465	2.66%
HORNED LARK	Maryland	8	1168	0.68%
HORNED LARK	Maine	7	402	1.74%
HORNED LARK	Michigan	38	2347	1.62%
HORNED LARK	MINNESOTA	24	1037	2.31%
HORNED LARK	MISSOURI	103	2156	4.78%
HORNED LARK	MISSISSIPPI	4	570	0.70%
HORNED LARK	MONTANA	9	163	5.52%
HORNED LARK	NORTH CAROLINA	1	1540	0.06%
HORNED LARK	NORTH DAKOTA	5	399	1.25%
HORNED LARK	NEBRASKA	23	1200	1.92%
HORNED LARK	NEW HAMPSHIRE	9	688	1.31%
HORNED LARK	NEW JERSEY	26	2717	0.96%
HORNED LARK	NEW MEXICO	14	367	3.81%
HORNED LARK	NEVADA	6	465	1.29%
HORNED LARK	NEW YORK	39	5239	0.74%
HORNED LARK	OHIO	46	3577	1.29%
HORNED LARK	OKLAHOMA	6	1088	0.55%
HORNED LARK	ONTARIO	1	102	0.98%
HORNED LARK	OREGON	7	1604	0.44%
HORNED LARK	PENNSYLVANIA	5	3054	0.16%
HORNED LARK	RHODE ISLAND	15	438	3.42%
HORNED LARK	SOUTH CAROLINA	3	1238	0.24%
HORNED LARK	SOUTH DAKOTA	8	259	3.09%
HORNED LARK	TENNESSEE	6	2825	0.21%
HORNED LARK	TEXAS	95	7533	1.26%

Species	State	Strikes	Total State Strikes	% of total
HORNED LARK	UNK	22	11193	0.20%
HORNED LARK	UTAH	75	1180	6.36%
HORNED LARK	VERMONT	4	129	3.10%
HORNED LARK	WASHINGTON	10	1484	0.67%
HORNED LARK	WISCONSIN	10	986	1.01%
HORNED LARK	WEST VIRGINIA	4	356	1.12%
HORNED LARK	WYOMING	1	102	0.98%

Selected Search Criteria:

From: Jan 1990 To: Apr 2009

State: ALL

Species: HORNED LARK

Source: FAA National Wildlife Strike Database (Level IIIA) - Version 2009.4-P dated 9-25-2009

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Oregon Only Details

Incident Date	Airport	State	FAA Region	Operator	Aircraft	Damage Code*	Species
02-06-2002	KLAMATH FALLS INTL (KLMT)	OR	ANM	MILITARY	F-15C	N	HORNED LARK
10-03-2004	MAHLON SWEET FLD (KEUG)	OR	ANM	AMERICA WEST AIRLINES	A-320	N	HORNED LARK
11-09-2005	PORTLAND INTL (OR) (KPDJ)	OR	ANM	SKYWEST AIRLINES	EMB-120	N	HORNED LARK
08-28-2007	KLAMATH FALLS INTL (KLMT)	OR	ANM	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN		HORNED LARK
02-26-2008	KLAMATH FALLS INTL (KLMT)	OR	ANM	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN		HORNED LARK
04-23-2008	KLAMATH FALLS INTL (KLMT)	OR	ANM	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN		HORNED LARK
05-06-2008	KLAMATH FALLS INTL (KLMT)	OR	ANM	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN		HORNED LARK