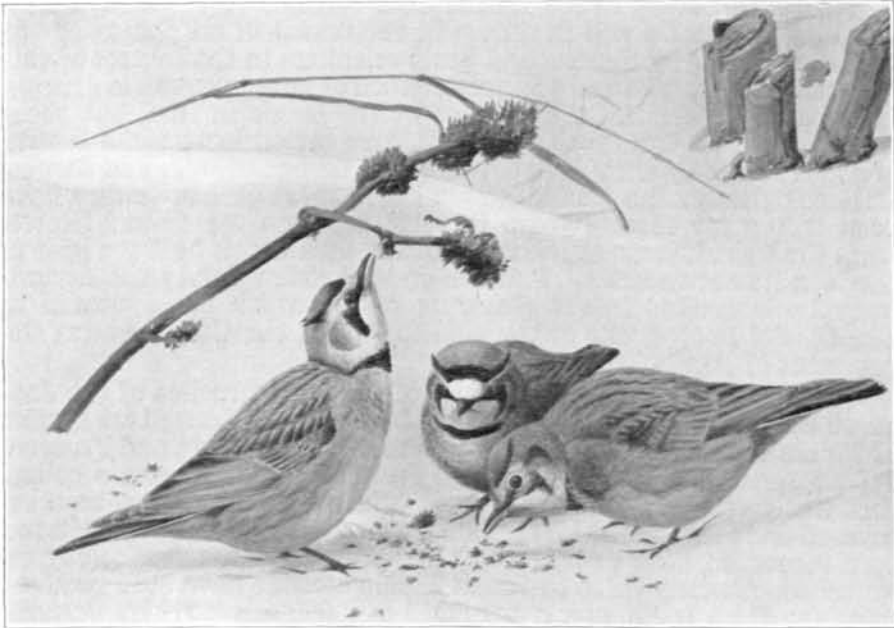


Birds of the Golf Course

The Horned Lark

By W. L. McAtee

Over the links at St. Andrews, and we presume over any in western Europe, on a bonny May morning skylarks fill the air with song. It is a vivacious tinkling melody delivered both on the ground and on the wing. It has a swing as if the songster were coming nearer and going farther away from the hearer, like a pendulum in the air. It continues in crescendo as the bird circles higher and higher, although finally becoming very faint, and is ended by a headlong pitch to the ground where the bird alights softly as a feather and utters perhaps a few more deliberate grace notes.



Drawing by Louis Agassiz Fuertes

The horned lark, a welcome golf course visitor, feeding on amaranth

We have in this country a relative of the skylark, namely the horned lark, that is equally at home on golf courses, and behaves much in the same way, its song, however, being not as loud nor as frequently delivered. These birds are vinaceous brown on the back with black feathers on each side of the tail. The throat is whitish or yellowish, set off by a black crescent on the breast; there is a black line from bill through eye and curving downward below it, and a tuft of black feathers each side of the crown, that can be erected; these have suggested the popular name. Horned larks nest in the northern and western states, and wander more or less to the southward in winter; they are of irregular occurrence in the vicinity of the District of Columbia, and are more frequently seen on golf courses than elsewhere.

This is because they are birds of the open; they fear not snow-covered fields nor wind-swept prairies. They are strictly ground-loving birds, being rarely seen perched on any elevated object. When disturbed they rise in a straggling manner, uttering short, whistled notes, and are as apt as not after a brief flight to return to or near the point of departure.

Horned larks have a useful relation to golf courses through their food habits. They are fond of weed seeds, making nearly two-thirds of their food of them, and consume large numbers of the seeds of such turf pests as crab grass, smartweeds, foxtail grass, chickweeds, dandelion, and others. Among insects and other crawling nuisances on golf courses that are eaten by horned larks are white grubs, wire-worms, dung beetles, clover leaf and clover root weevils, grasshoppers, leaf-hoppers, chinch bugs, ants, and earthworms.

Horned larks do no harm on golf courses and little anywhere else; they help to control both weed and insect pests of turf, and are attractive in appearance, action, and music. They are among the most interesting of our bird friends, and should be treated as such.

Chestnut Blight Spreading

Of interest to many southern golf courses is a recent statement of the Department of Agriculture to the effect that the chestnut blight is continuing its rapid spread in the southern states. The department, in a statement sent to the press, advises owners of chestnut timber to consider carefully the salvage feature involved, particularly in regard to the smaller trees suitable for poles or for the manufacture of tannic acid, as the chances appear to be that due to the spread of the blight these trees will not reach maturity. It is expected that within the next ten years the blight will have killed most of the chestnut timber in the southern Appalachian region. The spread of the blight covers the states of West Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, Tennessee, and Kentucky. The Department of Agriculture now has a botanist searching the wilds of Formosa and Korea for new species of chestnut trees for introduction into the United States in the hope of obtaining a blight-resistant tree.

Compost Pits.—A well-screened, out-of-the-way spot in or adjacent to woods on any golf course is an ideal location for the construction of compost pits. Into this pit weeds, leaves, and rakings may be dumped, and the dampness which collects naturally in such low places will quickly aid in the decomposition of the material and in rendering it suitable for use as compost. Sand, clay, or loam can be advantageously added to the contents of the pit from time to time. The addition of lime hastens the decomposition and counteracts any excess of acidity that may develop in the decomposing process. The addition of nitrate of soda or sulphate of ammonia speeds up decomposition remarkably, and may be used to advantage if quick results are desired. It will also help to turn the contents over with forks occasionally. On most golf courses over the country oak leaves are available in great abundance. It is true these contain tannic acid, but it has been found that the tannic acid disappears in the process of decomposition.