

LARK SPARROW NESTING IN THE PEACE RIVER REGION OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

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The Lark Sparrow (*Chondestes grammacus*), a widespread breeding species of open habitats across much of western and central United States, reaches the northern limits of its summer range in western North America in the Okanagan and Similkameen valleys of British Columbia (Martin and Parrish 2000; Campbell et al. 2001). The northernmost nesting in the province has been reported from the vicinity of Savona 41 km west of Kamloops.

On 25 June 2004, I spotted an adult Lark Sparrow at Lynx Creek, about 5 km northeast of Hudson's Hope. The bird was in an open natural meadow with scattered small Saskatoon (*Amelanchier alnifolia*), western snowberry (*Symphoricarpos occidentalis*), and wild rose (*Rosa* spp.) shrubs surrounded by a mixed-age trembling aspen (*Populus tremuloides*) woodland. The following day I watched the bird as it disappeared behind a bush, suggesting it might have a nest nearby. A short search revealed the sparrow sitting on it. Retreating, I watched until the bird flew from the nest, then inspected it to find two eggs. The nest was on the ground,

under a 40 cm tall Saskatoon bush and built mostly of coarse grasses with a lining of finer grasses and hair. The nest was on a south-facing slope at the north edge of the otherwise level meadow.

On 1 July, after watching from a distance until the adult Lark Sparrow left the nest site, I inspected and found it now contained 5 eggs (Figure 1). Over the next two weeks I visited the nest on four occasions (4, 7, 12, and 14 July) and, from a safe distance, watched the sparrow leave and return to the nest. On 17 July I watched the nest from 0800 to 1000 h but no Lark Sparrow was seen or heard. I finally checked the nest and found it contained five cold eggs. I water-tested the eggs and found that they all floated vertically, suggesting no embryonic development. At no time during the 22 days of observation did I observe a pair of sparrows (male and female) together.



Figure 1. Lark Sparrow (*Chondestes grammacus*) nest containing five eggs at Lynx Creek, BC. 17 July 2004 (Steve Myers). B C Photo 3044.

The full complement of eggs was probably completed by 29 June. The incubation period for this species is 11-12 days (Baeppler 1968) suggesting that eggs should have hatched about 10 or 11 July. The last date the adult was observed on the nest was 14 July suggesting an incubation period of at least 15 days. The egg dates for the Lynx Creek nest fall within the nesting chronology (i.e., 12 May to 15 July) for Lark Sparrows in southern areas of British Columbia (Campbell et al. 2001).

This failed, and isolated nesting attempt, extends the potential breeding range in British Columbia at least 590 km north of the known nesting area in the southern portion of the province and represents the most northern nesting attempt in North America. In adjacent Alberta, the most northern breeding occurs in southeastern portions of the province at

Big Valley and Czar, and there are no extralimital records for northwestern Alberta (Semenchuk 1992).

Additional notes and correspondence have been deposited at the Wildlife Data Centre in Victoria. The photos are catalogued in the BC Photo File.

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About the Author

Steve has been an avid bird-watcher and wildlife enthusiast since his childhood, growing-up on a farm in southern Ontario. He has worked for conservation departments in Ontario, Alberta, and British Columbia, and is now self-employed, focusing on outdoor/wildlife-oriented endeavours. He is presently a regional co-ordinator for the Biodiversity Centre for Wildlife Studies in Hudson's Hope.