

Texas to Colorado Migrants

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We've lived on South Padre Island (SPI) since 2007, but almost every year we travel from our home in SPI to Denver, Colorado in the spring and return in the fall. Recently, while visiting the Rocky Mountain Arsenal National Wildlife Refuge, east of Denver, I discovered that we are not the only ones that do this annual round trip. Although the Lark Bunting is the Colorado state bird, it spends its winters in Texas, too.

During the 25 years I lived in Colorado, I had never seen a single Lark Bunting, however, I had seen them while driving through Nebraska in July 2010. I only know this because I started keeping records of bird sightings in 2003 when I received the third edition of *Birder's Life List and Diary* published by Cornell Lab of Ornithology. It turned out to be one of the best gifts I've ever received.

The male Lark Bunting is easy to recognize with its black, sparrow-sized black body and white on its wings. The females, non-breeding males, and immature Lark Buntings look like sparrows to me. They are described as a large sparrow with a very thick beak and bluish bill on the Lark Bunting Identification in All About Birds. They have "brownish feathers above and are pale with brown streaking below with extensive white in the upper wing coverts and small white tips to the inner tail feathers," according to the All About Birds website.

As we drove through the refuge, I saw large flocks of Lark Buntings swooping across the fields and feeding in the grass along the road. I found them much more interesting than the bison in the fields.



Immature male or female Lark Bunting



Male Lark Bunting

When I looked at the All About Birds site on the internet, I learned that they migrate just like me. I also found that according to the American Bird Conservancy, "Lark Buntings eat seeds, invertebrates, and some fruits. During the breeding season they feed mostly on insects, especially grasshoppers. They also make short flights to capture insects in the air." Lark Buntings breed in open grasslands, and they forage and nest in agricultural fields from the southern Great Plains into northern Mexico.