

SNOW LARK-BUNTING.

+PLECTROPHANES NIVALIS, *Linn.*

PLATE CLV.—ADULT AND YOUNG.

As soon as the cold blasts of winter have stiffened the earth's surface, and brought with them the first snow-clouds, millions of these birds, driven before the pitiless storm, make their way towards milder climes. Their wings seem scarcely able to support their exhausted, nay almost congealed bodies, which seem little larger than the great feathery flakes of the substance from which these delicate creatures have borrowed their name. In compressed squadrons they are seen anxiously engaged in attempting to overcome the difficulties which beset them amid their perilous adventures. They now glide low over the earth, relax the closeness of their phalanx, and with amazing swiftness sweep over the country in search of that food, without which they must all shortly perish. Disappointed in their endeavours, the travellers again ascend, close their files, and continue their journey. At last, when nearly exhausted by fatigue and hunger, some leader espies the wished-for land, not yet buried in snow. Joyful notes are heard from the famished voyagers, while with relaxed flight, and wings and tail expanded, they float as it were in broad circles, towards the spot where they are to find relief. They alight, disperse, run nimbly in masses from the foot of one corn stalk to the next, scratch the ground here, pick up a dormant insect there, or nibble the small seeds of the withered grass, mixing them with a portion of gravel. Now two meet, and contend for the scanty morsel; the weaker gives way, for hunger, it seems, acts on birds as on other beings, rendering them selfish and unfeeling.

The Snow Buntings enter the eastern portions of the Union sometimes early in November, and remain in such parts as suit them best until the month of March. They now and then alight on trees, frequently on fences, and sometimes on the roofs of low buildings, in such compact bodies or continued lines, as to render it easy for the sportsman who may be inclined to shoot them, to procure a great number at once.

This species, while in the United States, never enters the woods, but prefers either the barren portions of our elevated table-lands, or the vicinity of the sea, lakes, or rivers, where much loose sand, intermixed with small clumps of bushes and grasses, is to be found. To such places I have thought

that the Snow Buntings endeavour to return each successive winter, unless compelled by the weather to proceed still farther south. I have seen them on the borders of Lake Erie, and on some of the barrens of Kentucky, for several successive seasons in the same neighbourhood. At Louisville I saw a flock each winter, on a piece of open ground between that city and the village of Shippingport, when their movements seldom extended beyond a space half a mile in diameter. It was there that one morning I caught several which were covered with hoarfrost, and so benumbed, that they were unable to fly. At that season, they kept company with the Shore-larks, the Lark-finches, and several species of Sparrow. They frequently alighted on trees, particularly the sweet gum, of which they eat the seeds.

The flight of this bird has a considerable resemblance to that of the Shore-lark, being rapid, elevated, and greatly protracted. It glides, as it were, through the air, in long and easy undulations, repeating a soft whistling call-note at each of these curves. While on the ground they run nimbly, and if wounded make off with great celerity, hiding in the grass, where it is difficult to find them, as they lie close and silent until danger is over.

When they first arrive, they are usually gentle and easily approached; but as their flesh is savoury, and their appearance attractive, they are shot in immense numbers, so that they soon become shy and wary. During moderate weather, they become more careless, appear to stray farther from each other, and if by the middle of the day the sun shines out warm, the male birds sing a few plaintive but soft and agreeable notes.

Only a single nest of this bird has been found within the limits of the United States. It was seen by WRIGHT BOOTT, Esq. of Boston, on a declivity of the White Mountains of New Hampshire, in the month of July 1831. That gentleman described it to me as being fixed on the ground amid low bushes, and formed like that of the Song Sparrow. It contained young ones.

Whilst with us, these birds are found in all varieties of plumage, excepting the pure white and black, which form their summer dress. I have not seen any having these colours, even among those procured late in March, when they usually leave the United States. In Labrador and Newfoundland, they are known by the name of the "White-bird." Their food there consists of grass seeds, insects of various kinds, and minute testaceous mollusca. They not unfrequently alight on the wild oats growing on the borders of lakes and ponds, to feed on its seeds, and with all these substances they mix a proportion of fine sand or gravel.

In winter, from Nova Scotia to Kentucky. Abundant. Much rarer along the Atlantic coast. Some breed in Vermont and Massachusetts. Fur Countries in summer.

SNOW BUNTING, *Emberiza nivalis*, Wils. Amer. Orn., vol. iii. p. 86.

EMBERIZA NIVALIS, Bonap. Syn., p. 103.

EMBERIZA (PLECTROPHANES) NIVALIS, *Snow Bunting*, Swains. & Rich. F. Bor. Amer., vol. ii. p. 247.

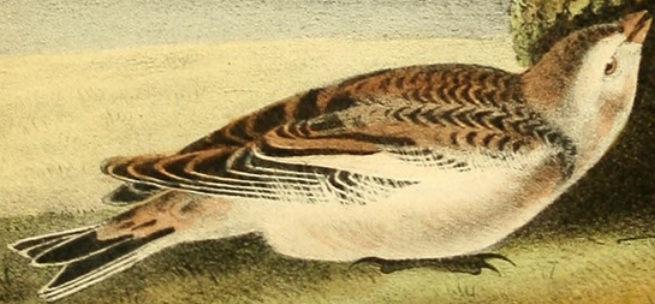
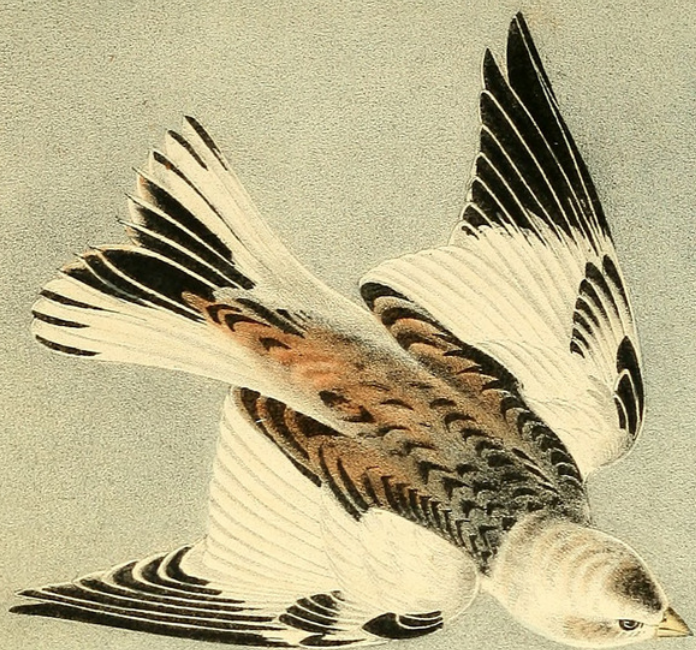
SNOW BUNTING, *Emberiza nivalis*, Nutt. Man., vol. i. p. 458.

SNOW BUNTING, *Emberiza nivalis*, Aud. Orn. Biog., vol. ii. p. 515; vol. v. p. 496.

Male and Female in winter.

Male, in winter, with the head, neck, lower parts, a great portion of the wings, including the smaller coverts, secondary coverts, several secondary quills, the bases of the primaries and their coverts, and the greater part of the outer tail-feathers on each side, white; the head and hind neck more or less tinged with brownish-red, the upper parts reddish-grey or yellowish-red, mottled with black, the concealed part of the plumage being of the latter colour, the bill brownish-yellow. Female, in winter, with the white less extended. Young, at this season, like the female, but more brown. Male, in summer, with the back, scapulars, inner secondaries, terminal portion of primaries, and four middle tail-feathers, deep black, all the other parts pure white, the bill black. Female with the black parts tinged with brown, and more or less reddish-brown on the head and rump.

Male, 7, 13.



^{2. 5}
Snow Lark Bunting

1. 2. Adult. 3. Young.



Audubon, John James. 1841. "Snow Lark-Bunting, *Plectrophanes nivalis*, Linn [Pl. 155]." *The birds of America : from drawings made in the United States and their territories* 3, 55–57. <https://doi.org/10.5962/p.319268>.

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