

A BREEDING STATION OF THE HORNED LARK AND
PIPIT ON THE GASPE PENINSULA.

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Plate III.

THE last edition of the 'Check-List' gives the 'breeding range of the Horned Lark* (*Otocoris alpestris alpestris*) as follows: "Arctic zone of Canada from Boothia Peninsula south to head of James Bay and Newfoundland."

The most southern point at which this bird breeds in Labrador is on the coast about Natashquan. Here the character of the vegetation changes from Arctic to Hudsonian. In 1909, Mr. A. C. Bent and I took a pair at Natashquan that were apparently breeding. In 1912 and 1915 there were none at this place, but I found them breeding a little farther along the coast from Old Romaine northerly and easterly. Natashquan is about two hundred miles northeast of the region about to be described.

The Pipit (*Anthus rubescens*) breeds throughout the arctic zone in the north and south along the higher Rocky Mountains to New Mexico, but it has not been recorded as breeding south of southern Labrador and Newfoundland on the Atlantic coast. In Labrador I have not found it breeding south of Cape Whittle.

It has been known for some time, especially through the explorations of Professor M. L. Fernald, the botanist, and Professor A. P. Coleman, the geologist, that in the Shickshock Mountains, near the north coast of the Gaspé Peninsula, were extensive regions of table-land above tree limit presenting the arctic conditions of Labrador. No ornithological report of this region had, however, been obtained. It seemed to me worthwhile, therefore, to visit a part of this elevated region, and in July, 1922, I made the ascent of Mount Albert, 3640 feet, spent two days on the summit and found a breeding colony of Northern Horned Larks and of Pipits.

* It would be well if this bird were called the Northern Horned Lark to distinguish it from the other subspecies.

Geologically the Shickshock Mountains, the northern termination of the Appalachians, are the remains of a much higher range which, since Paleozoic times, have been worn down to the present core of granites, serpentines and resistant schists. Another interesting geological fact, which has profoundly influenced the life there, is that the Gaspé Peninsula during the last glacial period escaped the great Labrador ice sheet which passed on either side. Although there is evidence of glaciation in some of the valleys, much of the Peninsula and the tops of the mountains appear to have escaped, and must have supported life as islands in a great sea.

The summit of Mount Albert consists of a table-land some fifteen miles in extent, rising a little at the edges to plunge down in chasms and precipices. Protected by the northern rim of hard schists is a straggling forest of black spruce and fir, rising to a height of five or six feet, with tops blasted by the arctic gales, and, on its southern edge, a little lake imbedded in the mossy and grassy tundra. Beyond are great plains of brown serpentine rock masses, riven and heaved about by the frost, and beyond are other plains that appear almost as green and as smooth as a lawn.

The flora is arctic in character, and comprises many species common to Labrador, such as carlew-berry, Labrador tea, pale-leaved laurel, moss campion and creeping birch and willows, as well as many plants, according to Professor Fernald, known only in widely separated serpentine regions, such as Newfoundland, northern Labrador, the Rocky Mountains and the Aleutian Islands, as well as a number of plants indigenous to these isolated mountains.

Of mammalian life the most prominent is the caribou. I found their tracks and discarded antlers everywhere, and saw a female caribou with her calf.

The views from this mountain top are everywhere of wilderness. To the north over forested peaks and lower land, is the Gulf of St. Lawrence, and, in the distance, could be seen the Laurentian Mountains, stretching along the north shore, past Godbout and Point des Monts and into the Labrador Peninsula at the Bay of Seven Islands, which is about eighty miles due north. The mountains back of the coast could be made out, perhaps as far east as the Moisie River.



SHICKSHOCK MOUNTAINS, GASPÉ PENINSULA, P. Q.
1. Across Devil's Gulsh to Tabletop.
2. Serpentine Plane on Mt. Albert.

To the east, separated by a chasm over 2,000 feet deep, made by the Ste. Anne River, is Tabletop, 4,350 feet, the highest of the Shickshocks, with its peaks and domes of reddish granite. To the west, beyond another chasm, stretch the Logan range of the Shickshocks, some as yet unexplored, and to the south is a great wilderness of forest and lesser mountains and gorges, through one of which the Cascopedia River cuts its way to debouch on the southern coast. On the eastern and southern side of the tableland is a great chasm, known as Devil's Gulch, of wild and primitive beauty.

I soon found the birds I had especially sought, and I secured two specimens of the Horned Lark, to make sure of its identity. It was breeding in considerable numbers, for, at a very moderate estimate, I concluded there were twenty pairs. I saw several full-fledged young, and the old birds flew about with insects in their bills, scolding me anxiously. Occasionally I heard the flight song and saw the bird high in the air. The Pipit was present in about the same numbers and showed similar evidence of breeding.

The great summit of Tabletop Mountain as well as the arctic summits of many of the other mountains must also contain breeding colonies, so this region of the Shickshocks, south of the Gulf of St. Lawrence, presents a large and favorable region for the breeding of these birds. It is interesting to speculate that these two species, after being driven out of their northern range by the advancing ice, may have retained detached breeding colonies in this Gaspé island during the last glacial period, and that they migrated south for the winters over a sea of ice.

Other birds seen on the summit were White-throated Sparrows, Juncos, Savannah Sparrows, White-winged Crossbills, Myrtle and Black-poll Warblers, Winter Wren, Gray-cheeked Thrush¹ and Robins, a Spruce Partridge² with a brood of young and a Red-tailed Hawk.

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¹ The thrush was not collected, but a breeding bird taken at Percé was *alictus*

² Specimens taken later by R. M. Anderson proved to be *canace*.