

# Horned Lark *Eremophila alpestris* in Nameri National Park, Tezpur district, Assam

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On 11 April 2009 I photographed a Horned Lark *Eremophila alpestris* in Nameri National Park (26°50'N–27°02'N 92°38'E–93°00'E), Assam (India). The terrain of the park is uneven with altitudes ranging from 80 m along the riverbanks to 225 m in its central and northern parts. Tropical evergreen, and semi-evergreen forests mingle here with moist deciduous forests, while cane and bamboo brakes, and narrow strips of open grassland can be found along the many rivers. The area is drained by the Jia Bharali (also known as River Kameng in Arunachal Pradesh), and its tributaries, namely the Diji, Dinai, Doigurung, Nameri, Dikorai, Khari, etc. The park covers an area of 200 km<sup>2</sup>, and is augmented by parts of the Balipara reserve forests area, which acts as a 64 km<sup>2</sup> buffer on the opposite side of the Jia Bharali, and 80 kms<sup>2</sup> of the Nauduar reserve forests.

Ali & Ripley (1987) report that this species is mostly found at high altitudes in the Himalaya, and in NEFA (now Arunachal Pradesh). Grimmett *et al.* (1998), and Kazmierczak (2000) have put a question mark on its presence in Arunachal Pradesh, and completely excluded Assam, and Bhutan from its range. There seems little doubt about the fact that this bird has neither been seen nor reported from Assam before.

The photograph (Fig. 1) accompanying this note are essentially self-explanatory in identifying this bird. It is an adult male, as can be seen from the black band across the breast and black-white head pattern. The races *albigula* and *longirostris* differ in the way the breast-band and moustachial stripe are formed. In the former they are joined, while in the latter they are distinctly separate. Obviously this bird belongs to the latter race.

The bird was seen on the ground, at about 1200 hrs, near the forest check post inside Nameri National Park, not very far from the bank of Jia Bharali River, at an altitude of 80 m. The day was

bright and hot. This bird was, for about an hour, foraging under the shade of a tree about 4–6 m from the check post. It appeared to be in considerable discomfort because of the heat, as it kept its beak open for much of the time, and never ventured outside the shade. The habitat in Nameri is very different from that of the Himalaya, and Tibet, where it is generally found. The bird allowed close views, and after an hour, or so, flew away to a nearby tree. But a couple of hours later the bird was again seen a little further ahead.

Kelsey (2004) has reported this species from Delhi.

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## Editor's note

Remarkably, this same individual of the Horned Lark was spotted, and photographed by a party of Bombay Natural History Society's members, one of whom, Nikhil Bhopale, wrote up, and submitted a note for publication to this journal, about two weeks later than the above note. In it, Nikhil makes the following additional points: previous records of this bird are from Delhi, Kashmir, Gilgit, Chitral, Sikkim, Himachal Pradesh, Punjab, Arunachal Pradesh; NW Pakistan, Afghanistan, Nepal, and Bhutan (del Hoyo *et al.* 2004; Kazmierczak 2000; Grimmett *et al.* 1998; Rasmussen & Anderton 2005). It is not listed in Choudhury (2000). These birds feed on plant material in winter, and on invertebrates in summer (del Hoyo *et al.* 2004). They breed up to the snowline, 3,300–5,400 m in the Himalaya, and winter at lower elevations, 1,500–3,000 m, in the non-breeding season. But this bird was also spotted in Delhi, which is at 213 m, and we spotted this bird in Nameri National Park, which is at 94 m; this could probably be the first record from such a low elevation.



Fig. 1. Horned Lark *Eremophila alpestris* in Nameri National Park.

Nikhil Bhopale