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A NEWLY-REPORTED PEST BIRD IN PAKISTAN : THE CRESTED LARK

The crested lark, *Galerida cristata*, a medium to large-sized pale colored lark, has been noted as a pest of agricultural experimental plots at the National Agricultural Research Centre, Islamabad.

In early January 1987 we received reports that small flocks of larks were feeding on the leaves of newly sprouted rapeseed plants (*Brassica napus* and *B. campestris*). Damage was observed to be severe; the leaves had been eaten completely away leaving only the central vein. Damage was mainly at the edges of the field plots but extended 2 to 3 meters into the plots in most cases. Adjacent stands of mustard plants (*Brassica juncea* and *B. carinata*) were untouched.

In late January 1987 reports were again given us that crested larks were feeding upon the young tender leaves of small (2 to 6 cm high) chickpea plants (*Cicer arietinum*). The young leaves were removed leaving only the leaf stems. Damage was seen on other plants up to a height of about 15 cm. Small flocks of 10 to 20 birds were observed in the chickpea plots at almost anytime during daylight hours. Entire rows of plants were damaged, again near the field edges.

In mid-February 1987, an experimental planting of sunflower seeds (*Helianthus annuus*) on a 7 hectare field was being attacked by crested larks immediately after sowing. Birds were visiting the fields in small flocks and digging out the seed from 1 to 3 cm depth in the soil. Birds were seen in the field at all hours. To reduce the damage, sorghum seed treated with 0.5% methiocarb was broadcast throughout the field in late afternoon. The following morning birds fed upon the treated sorghum. Six birds were found to have died from the ingestion of the treated seed and for the next week no larks were seen to have visited the field.

During this period in which the larks were feeding on fresh green vegetative growth, there had been no rain. The normal food of larks is given as seeds and insects but we speculate that they also must require fresh green vegetation during periods of drought. We could find no previous reference to this species as an agricultural pest in South Asia.

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