

625-01-1997

To: Pennsylvania Ornithological Records Committee

From: Ted Floyd

Re: description of Sedge Wren

Enclosed please find a copy of an e-mail that I sent to Paul Hess, who was the Allegheny County coordinator for the North American Migration County (NAMC). In particular, please pay attention to my description (in **boldface** type) of a **SEDGE WREN** that I saw during the NAMC.

I am enclosing the original e-mail, because it was written immediately following the sighting, back on 10 May 1997. And I am enclosing the entire report — with reports of other species — because I think they provide an interesting context for the sighting of the Sedge Wren. The concluding comments (about the weather conditions that may have led to the presence of the Sedge Wren at Imperial) are admittedly speculative.

Here are some details that may not be immediately evident from the e-mail report:

Observer: Ted Floyd

Date: Saturday 10 May 1997

Binoculars used: Zeiss 10 × 40

Weather: low overcast with occasional drizzle

duration of sighting: about 40 seconds (plus, I heard the bird singing for at least 3 minutes)

distance to bird: closest approach was about 40 feet from the bird

> During my coverage of Imperial for the 1997 Allegheny County NAMC, I saw
> several species that require partial (*) or complete (**) documentation.

> (*) White-rumped Sandpiper. This is an uncommon spring migrant in
> western Pennsylvania, and a very uncommon spring migrant in Allegheny
> County. I saw a flock of 8 birds -- an unprecedented count for the county,
> and an excellent count anywhere in the region. At least 4 White-rumped
> Sandpipers had been present at Imperial during the week preceding the
> NAMC. This is the third Imperial record that I know of. I had a single
> bird last spring, and Chuck Tague saw a single bird (in autumn, I
> believe) several years ago. Surprisingly, two additional White-rumped
> Sandpipers were seen (not by me) in the county on count day (at an
> artificial wetland in Upper St. Clair).

> (**) Wilson's Phalarope. I saw a male wading along the edges of a pond.
> I recognized it right away by its active demeanor and "pinhead" jizz. I
> approached to within about 200 feet, where I could discern its bold head
> pattern. Specifically, I saw its black crown, white supercilium, black
> eye-stripe, and white chin and cheeks. The bird was black on its back,
> and light underneath. Its breast was suffused with a dull rusty color.
> I flushed the bird at around 200 feet. It flew away, but passed close to
> me. Probably, it flew to within 100 feet of me. In flight I was able to
> discern its white tail and unmarked wings. Even in flight the bird's
> needle-thin bill was evident. I did not hear the bird. There have been
> surprisingly many records of Wilson's Phalarope at Imperial during the

> past 4 years. This is at least the 6th that I am aware of. A Wilson's
> Phalarope had been seen at Imperial during the week preceding this year's
> NAMC.

> (*) Short-eared Owl. I saw at least 4 birds in the air at one time.
> This is a very late date for the species in Allegheny County, and I think
> the species may be nesting at Imperial. Two of the birds appeared to be
> paired. One of the birds in the putative pair gave an impressive
> soaring display flight. I have since learned that my notes on this
> display flight are consistent with several published accounts of
> courtship behavior in this species.

> (**) Sedge Wren. I heard a Sedge Wren singing just after 8:00 A.M. I
> know the distinctive song from the midwest, where I have encountered the
> species on several occasions. I walked toward the singing bird, and I
> saw it briefly. The bird was clearly a wren, as evidenced by its pudgy
> jizz and short tail. Its underparts were distinctively buffy, and its
> darker upperparts were faintly streaked across the back and head. It
> also had a faint eye-stripe. Several points separate this bird from Marsh
> Wren (and other wrens):

> * the distinctive song, which I recognized even before seeing the bird
> * distinctive, but diminished and faint, streaking on the back and head
> * an overall "fuzzy" and indistinct jizz about the head; this contrasts
> with the bold eye-stripe and crown of the Marsh Wren
> * the buffy tones on the underparts; and, less so, on the upperparts
> * the habitat in which I found the bird: a small, wet, weedy depression
> in an extensive grassland

> This is the first Imperial record for Sedge Wren, but it was not entirely
> unexpected. The habitat is ideal, and Sedge Wrens were found during the
> Breeding Bird Atlas in similar habitat in a nearby portion of Washington
> County.

> (*) Henslow's Sparrow. I counted 21 -- a good count for this species. I
> birded only a very small portion of the grasslands at Imperial, so I
> suspect there are far more than the 21 that I saw and heard.
> Double-digit counts of Henslow's Sparrow are routine, in season, at
> Imperial.

> COMMENT: I feel that the strong westerly and northwesterly winds may
> have contributed to a midwestern flavor on NAMC day at Imperial.
> White-rumped Sandpipers and Wilson's Phalaropes migrate through the
> midwest during spring. Sedge Wren is a midwestern migrant. Other birds
> that are common in the midwest but uncommon in the east included:
> Pectoral Sandpiper (1), American Pipit (43), "western" Palm Warbler (3),
> Wilson's Warbler (1), and Orchard Oriole (4). Overall, the good passage
> of shorebirds (11 species, 99 individuals) and poor showing of warblers
> (6 species, 12 individuals) was very atypical of a spring day in western
> Pennsylvania -- and rather typical of a spring day in the midwest.

Pennsylvania Ornithological Records Committee

Voting Tabulation - Round # 1 of

Species: Sedge Wren (*Cistothorus platensis*)

Date of Sighting: 10 May 1997 to 10 May 1997

Location: IMPERIAL

County: ALLEGHENY

Observer(s): Ted Floyd

Date of Submission: 1997

Submitted by: Ted Floyd

Written Description: YES

Photo: NO

Specimen: NO

Recording: NONE

Member	Class I	Class II	Class III	Class IV	Class V			Abstain
					A	B	C	
F. Haas			X					
P. Schwalbe			X					
K. Parkes			X					
R. Ickes			X					
P. Hess			X					
J. McWilliams			X					
T. Floyd								X
TOTALS			6					1
DECISION			X					

Comments:

Signature (Secretary):

F. Haas

Date:

4-19-99