

814-01-1996

CLAY-COLORED SPARROW IN ALLEGHENY COUNTY

Ed Kwater

On the evening of April 6th 1996, Regis Schultz of Mingo Road, Wexford, PA. called me to say that he had a Clay-colored Sparrow, Spizella pallida coming to his feeder. I went over to his house the following day but could not locate the bird.

A month later on May 8th Rege called me again to say that he had seen a Lark Sparrow, Chondestes grammacus in his yard. I was able to go over at lunch time with my wife Cheryl to look for the bird. I felt that Rege was a reliable observer as he had found Pennsylvania's second ever Black-headed Grosbeak Pheucticus melanocephalus at his feeder in September 1995.

An extensive search of Rege's yard failed to turn up the Lark Sparrow but while we were returning to his house I noticed a small bird fly into a bush alongside the lawn. Raising my binocular I realised it was a Clay-colored Sparrow. The bird then flew to within minimum focussing distance in a cherry sapling then down to the lawn where it began feeding on dandelion seeds. The following details were noted:

A small Spizella with relatively dull plumage. Head pattern distinctive. Broad buff central crown stripe and dark brown lateral crown stripes. Pronounced buffish-white supercilia. Thin dark brown post-ocular stripe extending all round the buff ear coverts. Lores buff and unmarked. Underparts uniform pale gray, extending around the nape as a broad gray collar. Mantle buffish brown streaked dark brown. Two thin white wing bars on greater and median coverts. Tertiaries black,

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thinly edged buff - Rump not seen clearly. Tail brown and slightly forked at tip. Upper mandible brownish, lower mandible pink. Legs pinkish brown.

At one point the bird flew into a willow tree and sang for several minutes. The song was a very dry, rasping "b222.... b222.... b222....", sometimes repeated 4 times. The bird was watched for 15 minutes through x 10 binoculars at ranges of 4 yards to 30 yards. As far as I am aware this is only the second record of Clay-colored Sparrow for Allegheny County.

When I asked Rege about the bird he confirmed that it had been present continuously since April 6th but that he had definitely seen a Lark Sparrow that morning (5/8) and was not confusing the two species. He saw the Lark Sparrow once again and tried to photograph it unsuccessfully. The Clay-colored Sparrow was present until at least June 2nd 1996.

I have seen 4 other Clay-colored Sparrows in PA before and several in TX.

Notes on Clay-colored Sparrow written by Ed Kwater

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WEDNESDAY MAY 8th 1996 - 1.00 - 1.30 p.m.

With: Cheryl

Weather: Overcast, warm 65°F. Wind very light.

REGIS SCHULZ'S YARD, MINGO RD., WEXFORD PA.

* Clay-colored Sparrow - 1 in small cherry trees, singing (this bird has been present since April 6th). First seen in a small bush 2 or 3 feet off the ground then in a cherry tree overhead within 12 feet, a roadside willow, then finally eating dandelion seeds on the ground. A small Spizella with relatively dull plumage. Head pattern distinctive. Broad buff central crown stripe and dark brown lateral crown stripes. Pronounced buffish-white supercilium. Thin dark brown post-ocular stripe extending all around ear coverts. Lores and ear coverts bright buff. Underpart uniform pale gray, extending around the nape as a bronze gray collar. Mantle buffish brown streaked dark brown. Two thin white wing bars, on greater and median coverts. Tertiaries black thinly edged buff. Rump not seen clearly. Tail brown and slightly notched. Upper mandible brownish, lower pink. Legs pinkish brown. Song a dry rasping "bzzz... bzzz... bzzz", sometimes repeated 4 times. Watched for c. 15 minutes.

Ruby-throated Hummingbird - 1

Northern Flicker - 2

Wood Thrush - 1 heard

Yellow Warbler - 1 pair

Rufous-sided Towhee - 1 pair

Chipping Sparrow

Pennsylvania Ornithological Records Committee

Voting Tabulation - Round # 1 of

Species: Clay-colored Sparrow (*Spizella pallida*)

Date of Sighting: 8 May 1996 to 8 May 1996

Location: WEXFORD

County: ALLEGHENY

Observer(s): Ed Kwater

Date of Submission: 1996

Submitted by: Ed Kwater

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					
N. Pulcinella			X					
E. Kwater			X					
R. Ickes			X					
G. McWilliams			X					
P. Schwalbe			X					
S. Feldstein			X					
TOTALS			7					
DECISION			X					

Comments:

Signature (Secretary):

J C Haas

Date:

2-22-97