

**PENNSYLVANIA ORNITHOLOGICAL RECORDS COMMITTEE**  
210 Welcome Ave. Norwood, PA 19074

8 February 2002

John Fedak  
28 Race St.  
Bradford, PA 16710

Dear John,

I hope you, Lisa, and Danny are well, and that your withdrawal symptoms from leaving Piney Tract are not too troublesome.

I am writing as required to tell you of four records from Clarion County in 1998 which did not fare well in the Committee's vote. The members' opinions were divided in all four cases, and the balloting for each record went to a second round (which partly explains the delay in our announcement of the results). The votes and the reasons are as follows:

**Clay-colored Sparrow, Piney Tract, 15-16 April 1998 -- Record No. 814-01-1998**

The final vote was three in favor of acceptance and four not in favor, which placed the record in the Committee's Class IV-A: "a record for which there exists a majority of evidence in support of an observer's identification; the record is probably correct, but not beyond reasonable doubt."

The members voting against acceptance expressed a number of concerns, primarily that the description of the call should have been more detailed to distinguish it from other species with buzzy calls. One of the members who voted "no" commented, "I'm pretty certain this (or these?) bird(s) were identified correctly, but not much of an attempt is made at eliminating potential pitfalls. Despite the fact that observer experience is compelling and the birds ended up nesting nearby I am left not 100% confident that this particular bird(s) was identified correctly."

**Clay-colored Sparrow, Piney Tract, 15-25 July 1998 -- Record No. 814-03-1998**

The final vote was two in favor of acceptance and five not in favor, which placed this bird also in Class IV-A as a most likely correct identification but not quite conclusive based on the photograph and other documentation.

One of the "no" voters commented, "Conditions tend to favor Clay-colored Sparrows breeding at Piney Tract. However, since the juvenile was never seen being fed by an adult Clay-

colored Sparrow, I am not convinced that the juvenile bird was a Clay-colored. In my opinion the photo of the juvenile is not close enough or sharp enough to certainly separate Chipping from Clay-colored. I would prefer more substantial evidence for a first state Clay-colored Sparrow breeding record."

(Of course your intensive efforts were subsequently rewarded when breeding was confirmed at the site.)

**Western Meadowlark, Callensburg, 6 June 1998 -- Record No. 858-01-1998**

The final vote on this was one in favor and six not in favor, placing this record also in Class IV-A as probably but not certainly supported by the documentation.

In general the majority felt that the "chuck" call was the only possible indication of a Western, the "more flute-like" song was not an adequate description. Some of the members believed in addition that they could only accept a Western with certainty by hearing an audio recording of the song -- and especially the call.

**Hoary Redpoll, Piney Tract, 25 January 1998 -- Record No. 887-01-1998**

The final vote was two favoring and five not favoring acceptance, again placing the record in Class IV-A.

I am enclosing a copy of my report to the committee on this record, as an example of some of the majority voters' concerns.

As you know, non-acceptance does mean an identification was incorrect, but rather that in all four of these cases a majority of the Committee felt that the details were not conclusive.

We hope this does not discourage you from reporting rarities in the future, because you will surely find some in McKean County.

Best regards,



For the Committee:  
Paul Hess, Chairman

814-Q1-1998

## SENECA ROCKS AUDUBON SOCIETY BIRD SIGHTING DOCUMENTATION GUIDE

This form is intended as a convenience in reporting observations of rare or unusual birds. It may be used flexibly and need not be used at all except as a guide. Attach additional sheets as necessary. PLEASE PRINT OR TYPE. The following checklist can be used to remind yourself of items that you want to include in this report. Not all of these points will be seen, nor are they all necessary to correctly identify a species, but not including something you saw lessens the value of your documentation. PLEASE REPORT WHAT WAS SEEN, NOT WHAT SHOULD HAVE BEEN SEEN.

### SIZE, SHAPE, AND PLUMAGE DESCRIPTION:

- Give size compared to a common bird
- Shape ( warbler, thrush, hawk, etc.)
- Head: colors and pattern
- Eye: color, ring, stripe, lore, brow
- Bill: length, color
- Legs: color, length, toes (number, type)
- Upperparts: nape (neck), back, rump
- Tail: colors, shape, pattern, length
- Underparts: throat, breast, belly, flanks, vent
- Wings: colors, wingbars, length, wing linings, shape
- Parts of bird that couldn't be seen

### BEHAVIOR:

- Posture
- Feeding method
- Flight pattern
- Vocalization
- Preening or sleeping
- Other species present
- Interactions with other birds
- Nesting (building, brooding, etc.)

### NUMBER, SEX, AGE:

- Number of birds
- Sex by plumage or behavior
- Age by plumage or behavior

### LOCATION:

- Place name (town, park, SGL, etc.)
- County and State
- Habitat (field, woods, water, plants, etc.)

### CONDITIONS:

- Time of day
- Temperature
- Sky/cloud cover
- Precipitation/snow cover
- Water (depth, waves, % ice)
- Wind (speed, direction)
- Moon phase
- Sun (location in relation to you and bird)
- Length of sighting
- Distance to bird
- Optics (binos, scope, power of each)
- Experience with this species, years birding
- How were similar species eliminated?
- Field guide used (during and after sighting)
- Was description written from notes made during observation, notes made after observation, or memory? Was field guide used prior to writing field notes?
- Other observers (are they reporting?)
- Sketch or photograph (sketches, no matter how basic, are extremely useful)

SPECIES

Clay-colored Sparrow

DATE SIGHTED

4/16/98

### SIZE, SHAPE, AND PLUMAGE DESCRIPTION:

The bird was not seen.

814-01-1998

98

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SPECIES CLAY-COLORED Sparrow DATE SIGHTED 4-15-98 + 4-16-98

### SIZE, SHAPE, AND PLUMAGE DESCRIPTION:

NEVER SAW Bird  
ID by song  
Bird did respond 1 time to tape.

**Pennsylvania Ornithological Records Committee**

**Voting Tabulation- Round One**

Species: Clay-colored Sparrow (Spizellapallida)

Date of Sighting: 15 April 1998 to 16 April 1998

Location: PINEY TRACT

County: CLARION

Observer(s): John Fedak, Bill Reddinger

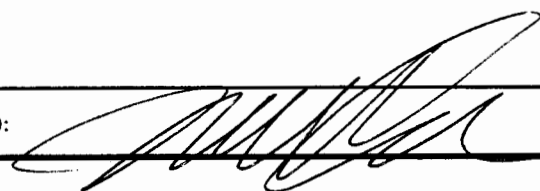
Date of Submission: 1998

Submitted by: John Fedak, Bill Reddinger

WRITTEN DESCRIPTION YES PHOTO NO SPECIMEN NO RECORDING NO

Member	Class I	Class II	Class III	Class IV-A				Abstain
					Class IV-B	Class IV-C	Class V	
D. Couchman		X						
T. Floyd								X
P. Hess		X						
R. Ickes				X				
J. McWilliams		X						
B. Reid			<del>X</del>	X				<del>X</del>
P. Rodewald		X						
TOTALS		4	<del>1</del>	2				<del>1</del>
DECISION		X						

Comments: ~~4/2/1~~ 4/2/1 2ND ROUND

Signature (Secretary): 

Date: 9/28/98

## Pennsylvania Ornithological Records Committee

### Tabulation Form - Round Two

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

Date of Sighting: 15 April 1998 to 15 April 1998

Location: PINEY TRACT

County: CLARION

Observer(s): John Fedak, Bill Reddinger

Date of Submission: 1998

Submitted by: John Fedak, Bill Reddinger

Written Description: Yes

Photo: No

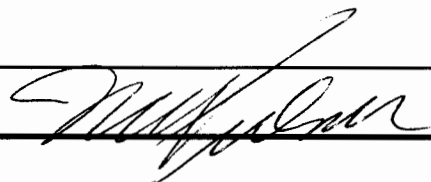
Specimen: No

Recording: No

Member	Class I	Class II	Class III	Class IV-A				Abstain
					Class IV-B	Class IV-C	Class V	
D. Couchman		X						
G. Armistead				X				
P. Hess		X						
R. Ickes				X				
J. McWilliams		X						
B. Reid				X				
P. Rodewald					X			
TOTALS		3		3	1			
DECISION				X				

Comments: 3/4/0

Signature (Secretary):



Date: 10/21/01