



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

814-02-1998

814-03-1998

Breeding Clay-colored Sparrows at Piney Tract

While birding Piney Tract on July 17, 1998, with Charles Studholme, I heard a Clay-colored Sparrow singing. The buzzy song was unmistakable. Charles and I took extra time to try and locate and verify by sight the bird. We soon located the bird and I ran back to the car to get my camera to try and photo document the sighting. I took 2 pictures. While we were observing the bird, it sang. I had a singing bird about 1/2 mile from this spot earlier in the year, but could not verify it by sight.

I was not able to get back to the location until July 19th. At that time, I located an adult, heard another bird singing at the same time, and observed what I thought could have been 2 fledged Clay-colored Sparrows. I went home and researched the species and became sure that the young birds could have been Clay-colored because of the coloration and the white median stripe on the crown. I called Margaret Buckwalter with the news and she told me another observer had seen an adult carrying food.

I spent the morning and late afternoon July 20th trying to document the breeding of the sparrows. I saw the adult Clay-colored Sparrows carrying food and I also observed the young birds. However, I also observed many young Chipping Sparrows. When the young birds could be compared, it was noticed that the young Clay-colored Sparrows were more buffy and had the white median stripe on the crown. The juvenile chipping sparrows were darker, seemed almost sooty, and did not have a stripe on the crown. I was able to take 2 adult pictures, but no feeding or young shots. I also never saw the adults feeding young. However, I did get a recording of the song.

I went back on July 21 and took a shot of an adult. Later in the day, I found an adult Clay-colored Sparrow with food and a young Clay-colored Sparrow in the same tree. I took the picture of the young bird, but didn't get a shot of the adult. The adult was about 3 feet higher up in the tree than the young bird carrying food. I never saw any young being fed by adult Clay-colored sparrows. I did watch young Chipping Sparrows being fed. Never did I observe a young Clay-colored being fed by a Chipping Sparrow and never did I observe a young Chipping Sparrow being fed by an adult Clay-colored.

Since I was traveling west, I took the young Clay-colored picture with me and compared the photo with actual young Clay-colored. This convinced myself and Jason Horn that we did have young Clay-colored Sparrows. I realize how the juveniles of both species resemble each other, but, after seeing literally dozens of juvenile Clay-colored Sparrows, I am sure that the bird in the photo is a juvenile Clay-colored Sparrow. The habitat seems ideal - fields, locusts, and young pines. The song seemed to only be heard early morning and late evening.

John G. Fedak

221 Washington Street

New Bethlehem, PA 16242

(814)275-4086

Pennsylvania Ornithological Records Committee

Voting Tabulation - Round One

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

Date of Sighting: 15 July 1998 to 25 July 1998

Location: PINEY TRACT

County: CLARION

Observer(s): John Fedak

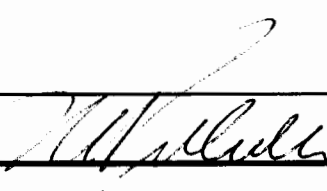
Date of Submission: 1998

Submitted by: John Fedak

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		X						
P. Rodewald					X			
TOTALS	2	1		2	1			1
DECISION								

Comments: 3/3/1 2ND ROUND

Signature (Secretary): -



Date: 10/12/00

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

Date of Submission: 1998

Submitted by: John Fedak

Written Description: Yes

Photo: Yes

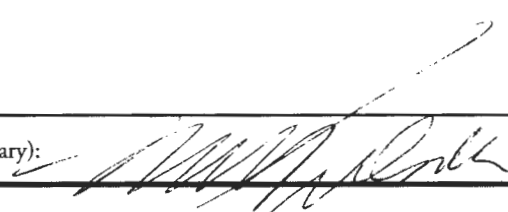
Specimen: No

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		1	1	4	1			
DECISION								

Comments: 2/5/0

Signature (Secretary):



Date: 10/21/07