

March 13, 2005

John Fedak
26 Race Street
Bradford PA, 16701

John

Many thanks for sending in the description of the Baird's Sparrow from Eldred on October 5, 2002. What an intriguing report. The committee unanimously voted not to accept the description as definitive, but this certainly does not mean you were in error. Rather the committee chose to be conservative on this report since it involved such a rare species and a potential first for the state. With records in NY, OH, and MD it is a species that I suspect will be documented eventually, of course, having seen one you know how difficult it is to get prolonged studies or a photo.

Just about all the committee members did not feel sure that all the potentially similar species could be ruled out based on the description and one potential species, a juvenile LeConte's Sparrow, was not even mentioned.

Sincerely

Matt Sharp
Chair: Pennsylvania Ornithological Records Committee.

826-01-2002

Species: Baird's Sparrow *Ammodramus bairdii*

1 individual
unknown sex

10/5/02

around 4pm

Bullis Mills near Eldred in Eldred Township
Bullis Mills Swamp south and west of SR1006 and SR446

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No other observers

Habitat was a large wetland predominantly sedges, rushes, grasses and cattails bordered by shrubs

I saw the bird about 10 to 15 yards away with Leica 8x42 binoculars

Conditions were good with sun slightly behind and to the left approximately 60 degrees F and little wind

No Vocalizations were heard

I kicked the bird up from some grasses and it landed on a tall rush, I viewed it for about 30 seconds and observed it fly down to the ground, I bumped it one more time and watched it land low, saw it for about 20 seconds and then it dropped. I bumped it a third time when it flew farther away and I could not get it to fly again.

I went back the second day with Dave Wilton and Ben Coulter, we had a bird that remains unidentified, but I feel could have been the bird, all we were able to see clearly was a white belly and we could not relocate it. The second day most of the sparrows were not apparent. 10/5 I also had a Leconte's Sparrow, Savannah Sparrows, Swamp Sparrows, Song Sparrows, Lincoln, White-throated Sparrows and White-crowned Sparrows.

I only have seen Baird's in North Dakota one summer so my experience with the species is limited. I do have lots of experience with Henslow's, Grasshopper, and Vesper Sparrows and I feel that this bird was not those species. I am comfortable with the identification and would count it personally, but a few field marks did not present

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themselves clearly, most notable, the tail did not appear 'short' in my observation and I could not see clearly the marks on the flanks of the bird.

During the observation, I used no guides as I had none with me, after I wrote the description up, I called Arlene Koch and Jason Horn and went through what I had written with them, I also used Sibley and Rising, as well as numerous web sites to confirm what I had seen.

Description:

The bird first show a flat head and relatively large bill, and the head was a buffy yellow. It appeared larger than a Henslow's Sparrow, but smaller than a Vesper Sparrow. It was close in size to a Savannah Sparrow. It had a strong Median stripe that appeared whitish near the bill, but became a buffy yellow towards the crown and was yellow orange near the nape. The bill was a darker flesh color washed darker with grays and the upper mandible seemed darker on top, but not black. The bill definitely was not a pink color like a Field Sparrow. The face was buffy yellow with and had no eyeline, but a dark patch of feathers near the rear of where one would be, there was another dark patch or partial line below that and what appeared to be a short moustachial line below the eye that became much thicker posteriorly, almost forming a 'J', these lines did not meet over the ear. The eye did seem to have a lighter ring around it, but did not appear white, but lighter buff. It did not look like a Vesper Sparrow. The side median stripes were dark brown with a few lighter lines through them. There was a dark stripe running from the bill down the side of the throat that became thicker near the breast and seemed to go across to the back in a thicker line.

The neck was buffy to buffy yellow (leaning more buffy with a tinge of yellow) with fine darker streaks - very visible. The wings appeared to be edged with a rufous-brown and definitely showed lines of black or dark brown through them. The belly was white and the breast was buffy (slight yellow tinge) with 3 to 4 bold, dark streaks running in a band across it. The throat was lighter, but still buffy and may have been closer to off-white on the chin under the bill, but still more buff than the belly which was very white. I could not see the flanks clearly as the bird perched and looked toward me or as the bird was facing me. There may have been streaks present, but I didn't see them clear enough to tell. The legs were pink. And the under tail that I could see was white or very light colored. The tail was forked, but I did not notice any 'shortness' and frankly did not think to try to compare the size with anything else. It did show a little lighter color towards the outer edges, but did not seem like the white outer edges of a Vesper Sparrow. When the bird showed it's back and flew, the back looked striped with alternating dark brown or black with light buff. The primary feathers in the wing also looked edged with brown.

Seperation of close species: The flat head and yellowish clored face rule out Savannah, combined with size, rule out Vesper - along with the median color. The face did not appear enough yellow orange enough nor did the breast marking and face markings match LeConte's. The yellowish wash and white belly and face markings rule out Grasshopper and the Henslow's has always appeared more olive than yellow to me, plus this bird looked bigger than a Henslow's.

826-01-2002

I had a very hard time submitting this report and realize it will probably be booted due to something that I missed, but I felt it was necessary due to the fact that I believe that this was a Baird's, it has never to my knowledge been seen in the state and other people should be aware of the possibility and check their sparrows carefully. After all, birds have wings and could turn up anywhere!

10/5/02

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of several loops and a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Pennsylvania Ornithological Records Committee

Tabulation Form - Round One

Species: Baird's Sparrow (*Ammodramus bairdii*)

Date of Sighting: 5 October 2002 to 5 October 2002

Location: ELDRED

County: McKEAN

Observer(s): John Fedak

Date of Submission: 2002

Submitted by: John Fedak

Written Description: Yes

Photo: No

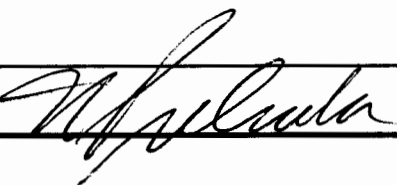
Specimen: No

Recording: No

Member	Class I	Class II	Class III	Class IV-A				Abstain
					Class IV-B	Class IV-C	Class V	
G. Armistead				X				
D. Heathcote				X				
P. Hess					X			
J. Stanley				X				
E. Witmer				X				
R. Leberman					X			
M. Sharp				X				
TOTALS				5	2			
DECISION				X				

Comments: 0/7

Signature (Secretary):



Date:

01/7/03