

830A - 01 - 1998

Bucks

Nelson's Sharp-tailed Sparrow - *Ammodramus Nelsoni*

Seen 8:30 AM on 10/1/98 at Eureka Stone Quarry property in Warrington Twp., Bucks County, Pa.

Observers: Ron French and Joe Majdan

Weather: clouds coming across the sky in a line predicting an impending cold front.

Temperature: about 68 degrees fahrenheit

Joe Mejdán and I were walking along a man-made path through a corn field on the referenced property when a sparrow flew up from the ground and landed on a corn stalk in full view. We immediately noticed the bright orange supercillium and orange on the breast and flanks. The breast and flanks were lightly streaked. I was stunned by the appearance of the bird and at first thought I might have a LeConte's Sparrow. I looked for the central white crown stripe of this species but instead saw that the bird had a gray central crown stripe. The bird dropped back into the grass among the corn stalks but I pushed it back up again for a second 6 to 10 second look. I immediately noticed that it had a gray unstreaked nape and gray cheek patch. Convinced now that it was not a LeConte's Sparrow, I wracked my brain to try to figure out what it could be. The bird dropped down into the field which is covered in Fox-tail grass among the sparse corn stalks. We could not find it again. After searching briefly in an impossibly thickly-vegetated area in the field, I told Joe I thought I could figure out what it was when I saw a book. Just then it came to me that I had just seen a Nelson's Sharp-tailed Sparrow.

We finished birding the area and went back to the house where I consulted my "Guide to the Identification of The Sparrows of the United States and Canada by James D. Rising" and without hesitation confirmed that Joe and I had indeed seen a Nelson's Sharp-tailed Sparrow and, in fact, an adult bird.

I eliminated LeConte's Sparrow since our bird did not have a white crown stripe and the nape was gray and unstreaked. The Nelson's is an overall darker bird. Salt Marsh Sharp-tailed Sparrow was also considered but it is rarely seen away from the coastal salt marshes and does not have the rich orange color on the breast and flanks. The juvenile Salt Marsh Sparrow can be as bright as Nelson's but not on the flanks and it also shows streaks or spots in the supercillium and does not have either a gray nape or a gray cheek or ear patch. We had only two brief looks at our bird and the features mentioned were the only ones we had time to determine. We did, however, see these features very well.

All other sparrows and buntings shown in Rising's book were considered but only Nelson's Sharp-tailed Sparrow meets the criteria for this bird.

David Sibley's article on "Field Identification of the Sharp-tailed Sparrow Complex" in Vol. XXVIII - June 1996 of *Birding Magazine* was also reviewed with hopes of identifying which subspecies it was. I decided after studying this article that I did not have enough experience with this species to determine the subspecies. I can say that it was definitely not *n. Subvirgatus*.

I have permission to bird on the property of the Eureka Stone Quarry. The Quarry property adjoins my own place. We invited several other locally-known birders to look the next morning but the bird was not seen again.

Respectfully submitted,

Ron French, 3469 Limekiln Pike, Chalfont, PA. 18914
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Joe Majdan, 1360 Eagle Road, New Hope, PA 18960
Phone: 215-598-3110

Pennsylvania Ornithological Records Committee

Voting Tabulation - Round One

Species: Nelson's Sharp-tailed Sparrow (*Ammodramus nelsoni*)

Date of Sighting: 1 October 1998 to 1 October 1998

Location: EUREKA STONE QUARRY

County: BUCKS

Observer(s): Ron French, Joe Majdan


Date of Submission: 1998

Submitted by: Ron French

WRITTEN DESCRIPTION YES PHOTO NO SPECIMEN NO RECORDING NO

Member	Class I	Class II	Class III	Class IV-A	SPECIMEN NO RECORDING NO			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					X
P. Rodewald			X					
TOTALS			5	1				21
DECISION			X					

Comments: 5/1/7

Signature (Secretary): 

Date: 9/28/00