





Harris's Sparrow (*Zonotrichia querula*)

Age: adult nonbreeding, based on the black crown, face, and bib. First-winters have much less black on the head.

Date: January 25, 2004, ~7:45-8:00 AM

Location: outside Sugar Grove, Warren County

Site: spruce tree at private residence

Observer: Ben Coulter
3431 Argyle Ave
Erie, PA 16505-1804
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aeridia@velocity.net

Other observers: Geoff Malosh, Mark Vass, Dave Wilton

Habitat: This sparrow has been coming to seed thrown under a large spruce tree in front of the house since mid December.

Distance to bird: The bird was viewed from a car as close as twenty feet.

Conditions: 0°F, cloudy, deep snow cover

Optics: Swarovski 8.5x42 binoculars, Leica 77mm APO scope w/ 20-60x eyepiece, Nikon Coolpix 995

Description: The Harris's Sparrow was seen in direct comparison to Am. Tree Sparrow, White-throated Sparrow, Northern Cardinal, and House Sparrow. The bird was much larger than the Am. Tree Sparrows, and still noticeably larger than White-throated and House Sparrow. The overall size was fairly close to a Northern Cardinal. The bird was very stocky, thick-necked, large-headed, and very long-tailed. In a nutshell, it is a very large *Zonotrichia* with a black face and upper breast, and a large, pink bill.

The head was proportionately large and blocky. The entire crown of the bird was black, with pale edging evident on the crown feathers. The face in front of the eyes, including the lores, was black, along with the chin and throat, and extending onto the upper breast. The supercilium, malar, and auriculars were a warm light brown, with a very faint postocular stripe blending into a dark brown triangular wedge at the rear of the ear coverts. The nape was brown.

The mantle feathers were light grayish-brown, with broad brownish-black central streaks, creating a pattern similar to White-crown or White-throated. The rump and scapulars were also gray-brown. The uppertail coverts were gray-brown, with darker centers. The bib of the face continued onto the white breast in a ragged triangular black spot. The sides and flanks of the bird were white, becoming smudgy grayish-brown laterally, with several rows of streaking: crisp and conspicuously black near the edge of the bib, and becoming dark brown and blurry for the rest of the flanks. The belly, vent, and undertail coverts were white. The median and greater wing coverts were blackish, blending to brown on the edges, and with a whitish tip, creating wingbars. Primaries and secondaries were gray-brown, with paler outer webs on the primaries. The brown tail was slightly notched, and sometimes held up at an angle.

The iris was light to medium brown; the pupil was visible in the center. The large bill was triangular, and orangish-pink in color. The legs were dull pinkish-gray, darker at the joints and feet.

Behavior: The Harris's Sparrow was rather skiddish and skulking, mainly staying under the lowest branches of the spruce, and coming out on the edge to eat seed, affording occasional good looks.

Supporting Evidence: see photographs by Ben Coulter.

Similar species: None. The black face and bib and large pink bill are distinctive. White-throated and White-crowned Sparrows are similarly shaped, but smaller, and differently patterned. House Sparrow is superficially similar in that adult males show a black bib, but even given casual study, all features are very different.

Discussion: This sparrow was discovered on Dec. 13, 2003, by the owner, Scott H. Stoleson, a birder who was familiar with the species, having previously lived within the normal winter range.

Pennsylvania Ornithological Records Committee

Voting Tabulation – Round One

Species: Harris's Sparrow (Zonotrichia querula)

Date of Sighting: 7 December 2003 to 4 May 2004

Location: SUGAR COVE

County : WARREN

Observer(s): Ben Coulter et al.

Date of Submission: 2004

Submitted by: Ben Coulter

Written Description: Yes

Photo: Yes

Specimen: No

Recording: No

Member	Class I	Class II	Class III	Class IV-A	Class IV-B	Class IV-C	Class V	Abstain
R. Wiltraut	X							
D. Heathcote	X							
P. Guris	X							
J. Stanley	X							
E. Witmer	X							
R. Leberman	X							
M. Sharp								
TOTALS	6							
DECISION	X							

Comments:

6/0

Signature (Secretary)

Date:

2/20/05