

PA Rare Bird Report

Submission Date	2018-02-10 18:00:34
Observer's Name	Scott Godshall
E-mail	godshallcs@hotmail.com
Phone	215-778-7325
Observer's Address	991 Camp Rd Telford PA 18969 United States
Names of additional observers	August Mirabella
Species (Common Name)	Saltmarsh Sparrow
Species (Scientific Name)	<i>Ammodramus caudacutus</i>
Number of individuals	1
Observation Date and Time	09-22-2017 12:30 PM
Did you submit this sighting to eBird?	Yes
Link to eBird checklist	https://ebird.org/view/checklist/S39370379
County	Bucks
Location (City, Borough, Township)	Warrington
Exact Site (E.g. Name of park, lake, road)	Bradford Dam
Distance to bird	30 to 40 feet
Viewing conditions	clear, sunny

Description

Copied directly from eBird:

First flushed with a group of Savannah sparrows as I walked along the edge of the reservoir. The bird happened to fly into a separate clump of reeds and then proceeded to walk out into the open. Bright orange malar and supercilium were very apparent, and I called August Mirabella, who was on the other side of the lake, to tell him I had a Nelson's sparrow. As I waited for him, the bird was very obliging, staying almost motionless, out in the open for over five minutes. It had moved and I had lost it before August got there. I was able to observe the following details: bright orange malar and supercilium, surrounding a gray patch on the cheeks. Gray center stripe on head, lined by two black stripes, which were in turn lined by the bright orange. Gray nape. Black and white striping on back. Breast had only a slight amount of buffy color, not nearly the bright orange seen on the face, giving the appearance of a discontinuance of color between the face and breast. White belly. There was no clear demarcation between orange breast and white as seen in most Nelson's - this bird had more of a transition/gradation zone. The bird had prominent dark brown streaking on the sides of the breast, continuing down the flanks. Streaking on the center of the breast was present, but not as prominent as that on the sides. The throat was clean white, contrasting with both the bright orange on the face and the slight buffy color on the breast.

When August arrived, I mentioned the fact that this bird had almost no coloration on the breast, and he suggested we might consider Saltmarsh. Eventually we were able to relocate the bird, although it was more restless, appearing and disappearing in the reeds. Attempts later in the evening and the next day by others were unsuccessful.

August has a good amount of experience with Nelson's sparrow, my experience is more limited but I am familiar with the species. Neither of us has much experience with Saltmarsh, although August has had it in the county before (following Hurricane Sandy). We both wanted to research the two species further, and confirm our ID as much as possible before submitting the sighting.

Bill size can be a factor in separating Nelson's vs Saltmarsh, but I do not have enough experience with either species to determine relative sizes.

The prominent streaking (particularly on the flanks), the slight coloration on the breast contrasting with the bright orange malar/supercilium, and the white throat led me to ID this bird as a Saltmarsh sparrow.

I was able to get one picture through my scope. Unfortunately, I have an old iPhone with a poor camera, and a sub-par spotting scope. The attached picture reveals few details. It does show an Ammodramus sparrow with a lightly colored throat, although the picture is so washed out that one could easily argue that the throat is not white. It does not show the streaking on the flanks, and the picture is so poor one cannot really make out the color on the breast.

Behavior (be as detailed as possible about what the bird was doing)

I first saw the bird fly into some reeds, it then came out into the open and stood motionless for several minutes. It then ran back into the reeds. Later we saw it moving among a different patch of vegetation.

Separation from similar species (How you eliminated others)

Prominent, dark streaking on breast and flanks (more so on flanks), bright white throat, and contrast between orange face and only slightly buffy breast suggest Saltmarsh over Nelson's.

Discussion – anything else relevant to the observation that will aid the committee in evaluating it:

I realize this will be a tough one to verify without a diagnostic picture. Attempts to relocate this bird were unsuccessful - both later in the afternoon, and the next day. A Nelson's sparrow was found in the same area two days later (by other observers), but after seeing pictures, I can definitively say that it was not the same bird. The Saltmarsh had an ever-so-slight dark stickpin of color on the center of it's breast - this Nelson's did not.

The picture submitted is not diagnostic - if anything, it probably supports Nelson's sparrow, mostly due to size of bill. However, according to online literature, bill size can vary among both Nelson's and Saltmarsh.

Are you positive of your identification ? (Why or why not)

More field marks point to Saltmarsh over Nelson's. I am confident of the ID, but have no solid diagnostic picture to back it up.

During

Sibley guide to birds of eastern North America

After

multiple sources

Supporting evidence (check all that apply)

Photograph

Upload images, audio, video or drawings



[Saltmarsh Sparrow 1.jpg](#)

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