

## PA Rare Bird Report

<b>Submission Date</b>	2020-10-27 11:33:45
<b>Observer's Name</b>	Matthew Sabatine
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<b>Phone</b>	570-656-9531
<b>Observer's Address</b>	United States
<b>Species (Common Name)</b>	LeConte's Sparrow
<b>Species (Scientific Name)</b>	<i>Ammospiza leconteii</i>
<b>Number of individuals</b>	1
<b>Age(s) and Plumage(s) and Sex (if known)</b>	adult
<b>Observation Date and Time</b>	10-11-2014 11:30 AM
<b>Did you submit this sighting to eBird?</b>	Yes
<b>Link to eBird checklist</b>	<a href="https://ebird.org/checklist/S20197574">https://ebird.org/checklist/S20197574</a>
<b>County</b>	Centre
<b>Location (City, Borough, Township)</b>	Bald Eagle State Park
<b>Exact Site (E.g. Name of park, lake, road)</b>	Frog Pond at Bald Eagle State Park
<b>GPS coordinates of sighting</b>	41.030428, -77.640716
<b>Habitat</b>	wetland vegetation on the edge of a stagnant pond (Frog Pond) including Big Bluestem, multiple species of sedge, cattail and early-successional broadleaf plants including young black willow and alder
<b>Distance to bird</b>	10-20 feet
<b>Viewing conditions</b>	clear and sunny with good light positioning (more or less at my back)
<b>Optical equipment used</b>	Vortex Razor 10x42 binoculars

**Description**

size was comparable to most other "small" sparrow species, similar to others in its genus (ammodramus). Overall plumage was of a very "bright" (by sparrow standards) individual, showing a pristine white below multiple shades of yellow, orange and brown above. The belly was a clean white with a clearly demarcated border between the belly and the upper chest and sides/flanks which were a bright yellow-orange color. Within the yellow-orange flanks were crisp and clear, yet fine black streaks that extended from the throat to the white border at the upper chest, as well as down the entirety of the flanks to the vent. The face was similar in color to the color in the flanks (a bright yellow-orange), though perhaps a shade or two darker (ochre-colored). The bird had a bold white eye ring and a small gray "cheek" patch below the eye, and a darker (almost black) "ear" patch behind the eye. The nape showed a vertical streaking pattern with blueish/purple shades combined with white streaking. All features noted above are visible in the photograph. When observed initially in flight, the bird showed a short, small and "spiky" tail.

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

classic LeConte's behavior. I was walking the edge of the pond in search of rare "wetland" sparrows (such as Nelson's or LeConte's) and the bird flushed from on or very close to the ground in the thick, wet vegetation right along the edge of Frog Pond. The bird flushed just a few feet in front of me from where I was walking, and made a very short, uncomfortable and awkward flight to the small alders and willows where I was able to view it more extensively (and where I was able to capture the photograph through my binoculars). This behavior is exactly as my other experiences have been with LeConte's Sparrows--reluctant to flush (or fly at all) and only doing so when approached in very close proximity, but when they do can be very confiding and perch for prolonged periods of time, atypical even of the most bold and curious sparrow species.

**Separation from similar species (How you eliminated others)**

the only other plausible species is Nelson's Sparrow, which I initially dismissed the bird as, really for no other reason other than that LeConte's are "rarer". While Nelson's Sparrows are a highly variable species with respect to plumage and appearance, no Nelson's in any combination of age, subspecies, feather wear, etc. shows the characteristics noted above, and evident in the photograph. Even the "brightest" Nelson's are not as pale as this individual. Nelson's show an upper chest and flank pattern to be more gray and "blurry" or "blotchy" as opposed to the fine, crisp streaks on this individual. While Nelson's can show eye rings, none are as bold and conspicuous as this bird. Nelson's have a clean, stone gray nape coloration as opposed to the streaky, multi-colored nape on the bird. Nelson's show large, broad gray "cheek" patches, not the small dark gray patch exclusive to under the eye, as this individual showed. Lastly, Nelson's lack the clear black "ear" patch behind the eye that this individual showed.

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

I was looking specifically for rare sparrows, to include LeConte's, and was initially quite certain of the identification as such. Only afterward did I convince myself that it must have just been a "bright" Nelson's Sparrow, really based on nothing more than probability. Also, while I had experience with having seen a handful of other LeConte's Sparrows prior to the time of the observation, I lacked the extensive experience I now have with the species, having since worked and lived in Montana where they are local, but regular breeders, among having seen multiple other individuals since 2014. LeConte's Sparrows, due almost entirely to their cryptic and unobtrusive habits, are vastly under-reported as passage migrants throughout the state. To that end, it's likely that, had I not been walking directly in line with the bird's original position, it would've never flushed but rather ran away through the vegetation, and I would have never seen it. Only recently, within the last handful of years, have birders started to gain a better understanding of this species' habits and occurrence within the state, and subsequent to that LeConte's Sparrows seem to be detected more regularly than in years past, including a few recent and remarkable spring records. The date of the observation (October 11, within the second week on October) seems to be the peak of the species' passage through the Mid-Atlantic region in fall.

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

yes. As mentioned above, I have extensive experience with LeConte's Sparrows, as well as Nelson's Sparrows, and I have no doubt as to the identification. I believe that even my poor quality, digi-binned documentation photo shows nearly all the features that support the identification, with the exception of the back and folded-wing pattern, which is not visible in the photo.

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