

Sharp-tailed Sparrows in Story County

(I would use scientific name once in title)

Before 1982, the status of the Smith's Longspur in Iowa was unclear. However, in that year a concerted effort was made by IOU members to seek out this bird in its appropriate habitat. ^{Iowa binders} ^{species} ~~the results of the search~~ ^{were} ~~were~~ nine individuals were found at six different locations. ^{with many} ^{being} ^{silence} ^{yes} Many more have been found in the ensuing years. I believe that the same situation ~~could~~ ^{exists} today in regard to the Sharp-tailed Sparrow. Dinsmore et al. in Iowa Birds states that from 1960-1982 only seventeen confirmed sightings have been reported. The authors believe that the ^{Sharp-tailed sparrow} ~~bird~~ is really much more common ^{the records show} ~~but~~ ^{and} than ~~that but~~ that we have not been looking at the right time or habitat.

On September 22, 1984 I parked in the west parking lot at Hendrickson Marsh in Story County. I proceeded southeast along the fencerow about one hundred yards encountering many different ^(what kind of sparrows flank?) kinds of sparrows. As I neared the marsh, the type and height of vegetation changed from ^{grassy?} knee deep to ^{broad leaves?} chest deep. It was here ^{first} that I saw a Sharp-tailed Sparrow. ^{when flushed} It would fly short distances of about 15 feet and then dive back into the undergrowth. On one occasion it remained ^{visible through?} ^(How close) visible in the vegetation for over five minutes and I was able to study it closely. I called other IOU members but we were not able to relocate it. ^{and not exactly}

On the morning of October 3rd Paul Martsching birded the north shoreline of the marsh from the east parking lot to ^{the} ^a ~~the~~ ^{with} ~~the~~ ^{grass} first point. He saw three Sharp-tailed Sparrows, two in view at the same time. Later that morning he found another Sharp-tailed Sparrow in the same location as I had on September 22nd. That evening Joe Schaufenbuel and Paul returned to the east side of

15 feet? That is very short 30-40?

weedy? grassy?

Henk,

Do you have a more specific intention of writing this article than merely promoting the idea that the sharp-tailed sparrow has been overlooked? Wouldn't it ~~be~~^{be} of interest to add a little excitement or substance by adding tidbits on how it was your newest life bird? It was my 304th state bird. And also give some details of the first birds plumage and how it differed from the Sedge & Marsh Wrens and numerous other sparrows especially the Le Conte's and Swamp.

Joe

the marsh and found one sparrow in the same place as in the morning. (The bird seen that day was found within 5 minutes, > 175 ft from the parking-lot.)

On October 10th, Mark Proescholdt reported to me that he had seen 1-2 Sharp-tailed Sparrows in the same general area as Joe and Paul, the area from the east parking lot to the first ~~point~~ weedy point (or describe in some other exact way)

These sightings bring ^{the following} several questions to mind: 1. This is an unusual year with more ~~birds~~ ^{sharp-tailed Sparrows} than normal. 2. The lowering of the marsh's water level by one third has created new, ^{preferred} preferable habitat that will disappear when normal water levels return. 3. The birds have been here year after year but we simply have not looked at the right time or place. Confirmation of these questions, I am sure, will be determined with the passage of time. (Are you so sure Hank? I have looked

in marshy areas from Sept 15 to Nov. for the Sharp-tailed for six years. I have seen many LeContes, Swamp, Savannah, Song Lincoln's, Harris' and other species. Why then not a sharp-tailed if they are so commonly overlooked? I can identify a Sharp-tailed, I am sure, if ever I had the chance to have seen one. But, no go. By the way there is a 1975 IBC Sept Issue short article by Rich Crawford of 30 Sharp-tails at Hendrickson's!)