

BIRDS: VERIFYING DOCUMENTATION OF AN EXTRAORDINARY SIGHT RECORD

1. Species Grasshopper Sparrow 2. Number 1

3. Location Willow Slough, Iowa

4. Date: Nov. 5, 1980 5. Time Bird Seen: afternoon to
5 minutes or more

6. Description of size, shape and color-pattern (describe in great detail all parts of the plumage, and beak and feet coloration, in addition, to the diagnostic characteristics, but include only what actually was seen in the field):
 Small, pale, ~~sharp~~ to sharp-tailed. Face light tan. Bill two-tone, darker above. Crown flat. Crown dark w/ light center stripe + ends squarely at the rear of the crown.  ← drawn now to explain description. No drawing in my notes
~~Darkline narrow~~ Narrow + short dark line behind dark eye.
 Side of upper breast ~~is~~ unstreaked, but bird kept its back to me most of the time. No orange on face. Some nape streaks, but my notes say ~~not~~ like a LeConte's. Pale orangish legs. Alert, but with rough edges all over like a young or sick bird.

7. Description of voice, if heard: —

8. Description of behavior: Perched on side of weed ± 3 ft. off ground, + figited. Flew away once, but not far. Was very low, perhaps on ground, when I flushed it.

9. Habitat - general: weedy old field, brush nearby ~~but it was~~ flushed it.
 specific: the weedy grass

10. Similarly appearing species which are eliminated by questions 6, 7 & 8. Explain:
 LeConte's Sparrow - eliminated by lack of orange, + by lack of streaks on sides of breast
 Henslow's - eliminated by nape streaks, but it's hard to be sure. Perhaps the difference in color between a Henslow's face + Grasshopper's face would be hard to tell in a backlit bird. Look pale, though

11. Distance (how measured)? 15'? educated guess.
 I was close.

12. Optical equipment: 8.5x binoculars

13. Light (sky, light on bird, position of sun in relation to bird and you):
 Bad light - bird south of me, sun south west. Bird partly backlit, and dust on binoc. lenses shows up top. I felt I saw it well after a while.

14. Previous experience with this species and similarly appearing species:
 I've seen lots of grasshopper sparrows + occasionally looked at them - well.
 Few LeConte's + no Henslows.

15. Other observers: none

16. Did the others agree with your identification? —

17. Other observers who independently identified this bird: —

18. Books, illustrations and advice consulted, and how did these influence this description:
 Books used now - Peterson, Birds of North America.
 For comparison

19. How long after observing this bird did you first write this description?
 Description - immediately after. The rest Dec. 10.
 Signature: Barbara L Wilson Address: R#1 Box 41, E

Date: Dec. 10, 1980 City, State: Hastings, IA 51540

RT 1 Box 41, Hastings
Dec. 10, 1988

~~RE~~ Dear Mr. Kent

I enclose a description of the November 5 Sparrow. I thought it an odd thing to see when I saw it. The bird stayed visible as long as I could to look at it. The bird seemed ragged, not smooth contoured like most birds. Hope this helps.

Barb Wilson

Is immature Le Conte's adequately eliminated, either by season or by the description? That's the only other possibility besides Grasshopper Sparrow. I'd never seen one, or looked it up until I wrote this up for you.

-BW