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DOCUMENTATION FORM for extraordinary bird sightings in Iowa

What species? Sharp-tailed Sparrow How many? 1-2

Location? Cooper's Marsh, Story County

Type of habitat? Sedge and cattails along the edge of a small marsh

When? date(s): 19 May, 1985 time: 6:00 PM to 6:30 PM intermittantly viewed

Who? your name and address: Steve Pivinsmore 4024 Arkansas Dr. Ames IA 50010

others with you: Paul Martsoching, Ames

others before or after you: _____

Describe the bird(s) including only what you observed. Include size, shape, details of all parts (bill, eye, head, neck, back, wing, tail, throat, breast, belly, under tail, legs, feet). Also mention voice and behavior.

The bird was viewed mostly in flight where the dark back with some faint white streaks was seen clearly once.
The bird had a habit of flushing and then landing and dropping down, disappearing for several minutes, making viewing difficult. I got a brief (10 seconds) look at the bird as it perched in some sedges at the waters edge. I noted the following marks;

Underparts mostly a buffy orange color, except lower belly which was white.
Back and wings extremely dark colored, almost black, except for a distinct gray patch on back of neck.
Head was generally dark - cheeks was ~~gray~~ ^{gray-aurantif} orange colored. Crown was uniformly black colored, unlike LeConte's Sparrow's light colored crown.

Although I had only a brief look at the bird, the field marks noted are diagnostic of a Sharp-tailed Sparrow.

Similar species and how eliminated:

Eliminated from LeConte's Sparrow by dark back, gray collar on back of neck and a dark crown lacking a central white stripe.

Did any one disagree or have reservations about identification? NO

If yes, explain: _____

Viewing conditions: give lighting, distance (how measured), and optical equipment:
light o.k. - partly cloudy and overcast - sun low in sky so little light. viewing distance 15-25' as bird moved around. I used Nikon 8x23 binoculars

Previous experience with species and similar ones: I have seen lots of LeConte's sparrows in Iowa and Sharp-tailed Sparrows in N. Dakota and on the east coast.

References and persons consulted before writing description: NBS Field Guide to Birds of N. America

How long before field notes made? _____ this form completed? 5 days

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