

BIRDS: VERIFYING DOCUMENTATION OF
AN EXTRAORDINARY SIGHT RECORD

CBC

1. Species Field Sparrow 2. Number 1
3. Location ~1/2 mi. s. of Tiffen, Johnson Co., Ia. at Clear Creek Bridge
4. Date: 16 December 1978 5. Time Bird Seen: 0805 for about a minute
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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): A small sparrow was seen as it fed in grass on south-facing north bank of Clear Creek. A light pinkish bill, both upper and lower mandibles, a rather prominent white eye ring, and a pinkish-brown crown were observed. Wing bars were not conspicuous and leg color could not be determined. The bird flew up to a tree branch above the creek and into inferior lighting. From this position about all that could be determined was that the breast was unstreaked and that the bird had a proportionately long narrow tail. Several minutes later the bird flew to a more distant perch and was not pursued.
7. Description of voice, if heard: The bird gave a few monosyllabic notes from perch over creek, but I could make little of them.
8. Description of behavior: Foraging in bent over tall grass on creek bank. Clear Creek was not frozen.
9. Habitat - general: Creek bed with forested area to north and open field to south. Deep snow covered most of area. South-facing north slope specific: of creek provided open grassy area as snow had mostly melted. Several song sparrows were in same area.
10. Similarly appearing species which are eliminated by questions 6, 7 & 8. Explain:
The Tree Sparrow, usually abundant in winter around Iowa City, has a dark upper bill and lacks the white eye ring.
11. Distance (how measured)? 15-20 feet(guess)
12. Optical equipment: 8 x 30 binoculars
13. Light (sky, light on bird, position of sun in relation to bird and you):
Bird first seen in direct sunlight about eye level with observer.
Sun 90° to line between bird and observer.
14. Previous experience with this species and similarly appearing species:
Field Sparrow is common summer breeder and Tree Sparrow abundant winter resident and I have seen many of both species during 3 seasons
15. Other observers: James Huntington identified this species / in Iowa. 15 minutes earlier about 200 yards downstream. I did not get a good look at that time so pursued bird until I could identify it. No one
16. Did the others agree with your identification? else saw the bird at the time described above.
17. Other observers who independently identified this bird: Huntington saw the all pink bill when he earlier identified the species.
18. Books, illustrations and advice consulted, and how did these influence this description:
Descriptions of notes(call) of Field and Tree Sparrows given by the Peterson field guide were checked and both eastern and western tapes were listened to, but nothing was learned from these exercises.
19. How long after observing this bird did you first write this description?
Notes were written down when we got back to car, about 10 minutes after the bird was observed.
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