

A PAIR OF CLAY-COLORED SPARROWS IN JUNE

On June 10, 1988, at 6:30 A.M., a pair of Clay-colored Sparrows, *Spizella pallida*, was observed for about half an hour at the edge of an open grassland at Fort Devens military base in Ayer. Approximately 250 acres in size, the grassland doubles as a drop zone for military exercises and as a home for a number of grassland bird species under investigation by the Natural Heritage and Endangered Species Program of the Massachusetts Division of Fisheries and Wildlife. These grassland species include Grasshopper Sparrow, Savannah Sparrow, Vesper Sparrow, Bobolink, Eastern Meadowlark, American Goldfinch, Killdeer, and Upland Sandpiper.

I found the birds at the edge of grassland habitat, where one adult, presumably the male, was singing steadily three or four times a minute from a line of low shrubs less than a meter tall, mostly Sweet Fern and Staghorn Sumac with a few Quaking Aspen and oak saplings no more than five meters in height. Bordering the shrub line and contiguous with the grassland was an open sandy area (about three hundred square meters), forty percent of which was covered with clumps of bunch grasses. Ground cover of Poison Ivy and Virginia Creeper with some shrubs extended behind the shrub line and graded into a forest edge of dense maple and aspen saplings.

The male continued singing, never once stopping to forage or leave the shrub cover while I observed him from various points along the shrub line. At times I was no more than fifteen meters away. A second bird that I assumed was his mate chipped at me constantly from a single oak sapling, where she remained, somewhat concealed by the foliage.

For two or three days thereafter, a forest technician who was assisting with the grassland bird work thought he observed the bird, but the sighting was not otherwise confirmed. During subsequent weekly visits, I failed to see the birds. The only evidence that suggested the pair was nesting was the aggressive chipping of the female. Nevertheless, the sighting is significant. According to *Bird Observer* records from 1983 to the present, Clay-colored Sparrows have been seen regularly in the fall and in May but have not been observed during June, which marks the height of the breeding season for most of our resident grassland nesting species.

Robert M. Marshall, Westport

SIGHTSEEING BIRDS

Returning to Gloucester from Stellwagen Bank on July 29, 1987, out of sight of land, we overtook and passed three warblers, all within ten feet of the boat, one so close that children tried to catch it. They may have been about fifteen minutes apart, but my eyes are getting too weak to identify accurately a warbler in flight. The marine biologist, who saw only the last one, identified it as a Tennessee Warbler. With three warblers flying that close to the boat, it seems reasonable to conclude that there may have been many more scattered over Massachusetts Bay.

What are they doing there at the end of July? Migrating?

Trescott T. Abele, Pepperell

HOW DO YOU COUNT?

Reading the 1987 Christmas Bird Count results in the June issue of *Bird Observer* prompted me to write to ask a question I've thought about many times but never had an opportunity to ask.

How are very large flocks of birds counted or estimated? I've read reports of roosts of thousands of crows or rafts of over ten thousand Common Eider, and since some research conclusions may be based on these numbers, I've assumed that there is some methodical way to count them without actually pointing and saying, "One, two, three...." I hope someday to see a raft of ten thousand eider, but until then if anyone has the time to write a quick response to satisfy my curiosity, I would appreciate it.

I'd like to share a success story. I moved to Jefferson, a rural part of Holden, in March and immediately set up four bluebird houses, not really thinking I'd have success. "My" pair of bluebirds fledged two young from a clutch of five eggs on June 15, and their second brood just hatched yesterday (July 5) -- four eggs, number of nestlings unknown so far. I'm very glad I went to the effort to start my bluebird trail!

Jodi Adams, Jefferson

A PARTICULAR GREEN-WINGED TEAL

From March 21 to March 25, 1988, I watched a drake Eurasian Green-winged Teal (*Anas crecca crecca*) on Pochet Inlet in East Orleans, Massachusetts. This bird was with several American Green-winged Teal (*Anas c. carolinensis*), and I studied it frequently at different distances and in different lights over several days. This is an individual that I recognize. This particular teal has a long horizontal white stripe on each side, as a drake Eurasian greenwing should. But this drake also has a faint smudge of white on each shoulder -- the top of what would be a vertical white stripe to the waterline were he an American greenwing. I am convinced that the yellow patches by this drake's tail are a lighter shade of yellow than are the patches on the American drakes present.

The Eurasian *Anas c. nimia* (NGS Field Guide 1987) and the American *Anas c. carolinensis* show intergradation in the Aleutian Islands, where both breed (AOU Check-list 1983). I wonder if my particular teal is a hybrid between Eurasian *Anas c. crecca*, the Eurasian form most often seen in eastern North America (NGS Guide 1987), and the American *Anas c. carolinensis*. This seems quite possible to me.

I first encountered this teal a year earlier on the same sheet of water. That was March 25, 1987. And I encountered this bird again on Plum Island on May 19, 1987. Now, here he is back on Pochet Inlet again. On each occasion I've seen him with American greenwings.

Andrew H. Williams, Haydenville

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