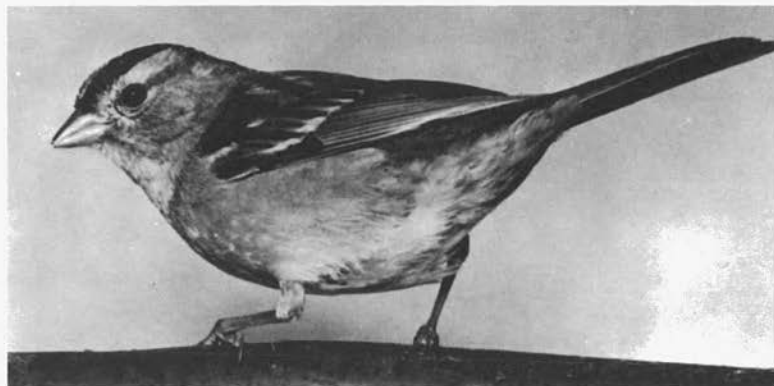


The mystery bird pictured in the December issue clearly represents some species of emberizid, i.e., sparrow. The bird's conical bill is the characteristic that best typifies this group, and the longish tail, prominent wing bars, and slender shape all indicate that the bird is some species of sparrow. Although sparrows have the reputation of being difficult to distinguish one from another, the identification process can often be simplified by paying close attention to several basic structural features and plumage characteristics. At the genus level, sparrows often exhibit sufficient similarity to reduce the identification possibilities considerably. The pictured sparrow appears to be fairly bulky with a rather long, unnotched tail and a medium-sized bill. This combination of attributes is particularly characteristic of sparrows in the genus *Zonotrichia*, i.e., White-throated, White-crowned, etc. Indeed, the bird in the photograph bears a resemblance to a White-throated Sparrow. However, what appears to be a white throat is not as clearly defined as is typical of that species, and the "white" seems to extend slightly lower onto the breast than would be normal. More important, White-throated Sparrows have dark bills and in their adult plumage usually show at least a trace of a yellowish spot between the eye and the bill. Immatures typically possess faint dusky streaks across the midbreast. By contrast, White-crowned Sparrows have a prominently pale pinkish or yellowish bill, a feature clearly revealed by the sparrow in the picture. Additionally, the presence of two white wing bars, a broad, pale eye stripe, an unstreaked breast, and a square-tipped tail serve to conclusively identify the bird as an immature White-crowned Sparrow, *Zonotrichia leucophrys*. The smaller and slimmer American Tree Sparrow, which slightly resembles the pictured bird, can easily be eliminated because it has a smaller dark bill with a prominently yellow lower mandible.

*White-crowned Sparrow**Photo by M. G. Smith, courtesy of MAS*

AT A GLANCE

Photo by Roger S. Everett



Can you identify this bird?

Identification will be discussed in next issue's AT A GLANCE.

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