

## NOTES

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### FIRST RECORD OF BACHMAN'S SPARROW (*Peucaea aestivalis*) FEEDING ON A VERTEBRATE

EMILY N. PIPHER<sup>1</sup> AND JAMES A. COX<sup>2</sup>

Tall Timbers Research Station, 13093 Henry Beadel Drive, Tallahassee, Florida 32312

E-mail: <sup>1</sup>enpipher@gmail.com and <sup>2</sup>jim@ttrs.org

Bachman's Sparrow (*Peucaea aestivalis*) is a familiar resident of longleaf pine (*Pinus palustris*) woods and open habitats in the southeastern United States (Dunning 2006). Though this bird's song is often heard where it is common, its secretive nature has made formal study of some life-history traits difficult. Due to heavy logging of the mature pine forests it prefers, Bachman's Sparrow populations are increasingly local and declining. It is also vulnerable to the common practice of fire suppression. Without fires to eliminate dense shrubs and open ground-cover conditions for this ground-nesting species, the population will decline dramatically after only five years (Engstrom et al. 1984). Accordingly, Bachman's Sparrow is now considered a species of management concern in every state in which it breeds (Cox and Widener 2008).

Bachman's Sparrows are strictly ground feeders, subsisting mainly on seeds and insects (Weston 1968, Allaire and Fisher 1975, Wolf 1977). The examination of 10 adult stomachs by Weston (1968) revealed an average of 58% animal matter, consisting mostly of coleopteran insects, and 42% vegetable matter, consisting mostly of seeds from grasses and sedges. Wolf (1977) observed that nestlings in July were fed mostly orthopteran insects. Allaire and Fisher (1975) found Bachman's Sparrows in summer to eat seeds (*Digitaria* spp.) and insects, mostly coleopterans, lepidopterans, and hemipterans. Until the present report there have been no records of a Bachman's Sparrow—or any emberizid sparrow—eating a vertebrate.

Field work took place in the spring of 2007 at the Wade Tract Preserve in the Arcadia Plantation near Thomasville, Georgia, during a study of the home-range movements and reproductive ecology of Bachman's Sparrows. The preserve is a 200-acre plot of old-growth longleaf pine forest that has regular prescribed burns. At approximately 0830 EST on 25 July 2007, we observed an adult Bachman's Sparrow on the Wade Tract grasping what appeared to be an anole (*Anolis* sp.) in its beak. Prior to this day we had observed several sparrows carrying food (mostly orthopterans) near known nest locations. This led us to believe the lizard was being brought as a food item to nestlings nearby. The observed bird was not one of the color-banded birds we were studying, so the sex and breeding status were unknown. The bird was conspicuously perched atop a dead oak (*Quercus* sp.) sapling, and the slender body, legs, and tail of the lizard were clearly distinguishable. We took a photograph through a scope (Fig. 1) before the bird descended into the ground cover. It is unknown whether the lizard was scavenged or killed by the sparrow. We did not observe the bird eating the lizard, but we assume it was fed to nestlings. The sparrow's behavior was similar to that of banded birds we had witnessed bringing food to known nests.

This observation suggests that Bachman's Sparrows, and possibly other emberizid sparrows, are more opportunistic in their diet than previously reported.



**Figure 1. Bachman's Sparrow holding a lizard on the Arcadia Plantation near Thomasville, Georgia. 25 July 2007.**

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