

## THE NESTING OF THE WORTHEN SPARROW IN TAMAULIPAS, MEXICO

By JOHN E. THAYER

THE WORTHEN Sparrow (*Spizella wortheni*) is an extremely rare bird in ornithological collections. Therefore, several years ago, I sent the late F. B. Armstrong to New Mexico to collect in the vicinity of Silver City, New Mexico. For the A. O. U. Check-List says this sparrow "breeds from Silver City, New Mexico, to Tamaulipas, Mexico." Although Armstrong remained three months in New Mexico, he never saw any sign of the Worthen Sparrow.

Two years ago a friend of mine collected a few birds of this species in Tamaulipas, and I made up my mind that there was the place to find it breeding. I therefore sent Wilmot W. Brown, who had collected for me for many years, to see what he could do. He started in May, 1924, and remained three months. He was most successful, not only collecting a fine series of birds but many sets of the eggs. These are, I think, the first eggs of this species ever taken. Mr. Brown says of them:

"I found the Worthen Sparrow breeding in overgrown cornfields where it nested—invariably in low weeds of the mint family. The nest is well made, compact, and well concealed. It is constructed of rootlets and grasses and lined with fine fibers and sometimes with horsehair and is placed without exception within six inches of the ground. Sometimes it even rests upon the ground like a Song Sparrow's nest, but supported by the weed in which it is built.

"In habits the Worthen Sparrow is almost exclusively terrestrial, though during the nesting season it sings from the tops of high weeds. Its song is a faint trill. In one instance I saw a Worthen Sparrow, perched on a high weed, dart into the air several times after insects, like a flycatcher.

"Outside of the cornfields, in the foothills, where the land is uncultivated and conditions are natural, this bird nests in prickly shrubs, the highest being about four feet from the ground. The nesting habits of the Worthen Sparrow in the cornfields of northern Tamaulipas have evidently become modified by change of environment. Before the valley lands were cleared and turned into cornfields, it no doubt nested in bushes and shrubs, but now the birds are compelled to nest in weeds close to the ground for protection."

The eggs are very handsome, resembling those of the Clay-colored Sparrow more than those of the Field Sparrow. They vary a good deal in shape, some being elongated while others are nearly round. The ground color is Etain Blue, and on the larger end of the eggs there are spots forming wreaths of Hay's Russet. The spots are also scattered sparingly all over the egg.

Three to four eggs comprise a set. Sets of three are much more common. Below are the measurements of six sets, in inches.

1. .66 x .51, .68 x .51, .66 x .50, .65 x .49
2. .67 x .52, .66 x .53, .67 x .53, .67 x .52
3. .63 x .52, .62 x .52, .65 x .53, .64 x .52
4. .66 x .54, .66 x .52, .64 x .53
5. .66 x .49, .67 x .49, .68 x .50, .68 x .48
6. .66 x .48, .67 x .51, .66 x .49

*Lancaster, Massachusetts, December 2, 1924.*