

ABNORMAL YELLOW COLORATION OF SWAMP SPARROWS

BY EDWARD GOULD ROWLAND, M.D.

SINCE publishing my "Notes on Swamp Sparrows" (*Melospiza georgiana*) in the July, 1925, number of the *Bulletin of the Northeastern Bird-Banding Association*, I have banded many birds of this species, new facts have come to light, and a problem has arisen which appears to be worthy of further investigation.

My traps, varying in number from nine to twelve and of various designs, were all located on the edge of a swamp in which grew cut-tails and alders, interspersed with grass tussocks. Around the edge of the swamp was a miscellaneous growth of red osier dogwood, raspberry and blackberry bushes, and spirea. The water-level varied at intervals, and occasionally I had to move my traps back in order to attend to them properly. For bait I used bread-crumbs, chick-feed, and gristmill sweepings. Swamp Sparrows bred here, as was evidenced by the fact of very young birds being trapped as early as June 25th.

This problem concerns the status of abnormally colored Swamp Sparrows having an excess yellowness occurring before the eye, as a superciliary band, occasionally the axillars, etc.

Since my observations were made, in 1925 and in 1926, several references in the literature to abnormally colored Swamp Sparrows have been brought to my attention by Charles L. Whittle in a letter recently received. These references follow my own observations at the close of this paper.

As I have had the good fortune to band a considerable number of this species, some as nesting birds and others as migrants, a tabular record of the same is offered below:

SWAMP SPARROW BANDING RECORD BY YEARS

	<i>Ages Undetermined</i>	<i>Known Immature</i>
1924	72	
1925	56	8
1926	49	23
	—	—
	177	31

The migration of Swamp Sparrows in 1926 lasted only fourteen days as against twenty-four days in 1925. The first bird was trapped in 1926 on September 19th, the last on October 3rd. During this short season I trapped seven yellowish

birds. No yellowish bird has been trapped in spring, and none earlier in the fall than September 19th.

Of the birds banded in 1925 many showed more or less yellow before the eye; eleven were conspicuously so marked.

The details of these eleven abnormally yellow Swamp Sparrows, which were probably young in first or second winter plumage, appear below:

<i>No.</i>	<i>Banding date</i>	<i>Remarks</i>
A32886	Sept. 24, 1924	Yellow lores.
A32895	Sept. 28, 1925	Yellow lores and sides of head. Bend of wing and line over eye yellowish.
A32932	Oct. 9, 1925	Yellow lores, chin white speckled with faint gray spots.
A32960	Oct. 17, 1925	Yellow lores; bend of wing, line over eye, and chin canary yellow. Yellow axillary feathers. Chin decked with dark spots, with two black stripes. Post-ocular line brilliant black.
A80719	Sept. 19, 1926	Yellow lores.
A80728	Sept. 26, 1926	Yellow lores and bend of wing.
A80738	Sept. 29, 1925	Yellow-tinged throat.
A80741	Sept. 30, 1926	Yellow-tinged throat.
A80748	Oct. 1, 1926	Sides of head and throat yellowish.
A80751	Oct. 2, 1926	Throat and bend of wing yellowish.
A80754	Oct. 3, 1926	Throat and bend of wing yellowish.

It is thought probable since the yellow coloration was found only on birds trapped after September 23rd, when my known nesting birds of this species had disappeared from the station, that they were birds breeding to the north of Belchertown.

The foregoing was written many months ago, but publication was withheld until specimens of the birds could be obtained for exhibition. The editor, however, now advises in the light of past references in the literature to abnormally yellow Swamp Sparrows that my examples of abnormally colored birds be placed on record, and that an effort be made to trap and collect this species in the same swamp in which my birds were trapped in the hope of definitely determining their status. Although I am no longer a resident of Belchertown, I have made arrangements with Dr. George E. McPherson to carry on the suggested investigation this coming fall. It is desirable, however, that any bander handling this species should keep the problem in mind, and should others trap birds especially yellow, it is hoped that they may be able to have them critically examined by an expert ornithologist. Mr. Whittle's notes follow:

"In Baird, Brewer, and Ridgway's 'History of North

American Land Birds,' plate XLVI, Vol. II, 1874, fig. 9, there is a colored head of a sparrow having the name *Passerculus caboti* below, the bird having the number '62373, Nahant'. This figure shows a grayish-white superciliary line terminating anteriorly in a yellowish spot. Oddly enough the text of the work makes no mention of this bird, which is now in the Smithsonian Institution. Mention of this bird next appears in the literature in the *Bulletin of the Nuttall Ornithological Club*, Vol. VIII, 1883, page 58, where Coues refers to it as 'a young *Melospiza palustris*, in a plumage hitherto unrecognized in which there is a decided yellow spot before the eye, and a vague yellowish suffusion of the cheeks and throat.' Coues also states (p. 58) that he had lately received a Swamp Sparrow from S. W. Willard of West DePere, Wisconsin, having a yellow loreal spot 'about as in *Ammodramus maritimus* and nearly as bright as in *Zonotrichia albicollis*.'

"In *The Auk*, Vol III, 1886, pp. 277, under the title 'Immature Dress of *Melospiza palustris*', by R. H. Bulley, appears a second note on a young female of this species taken in Canton, Ohio, October 16, 1885, of which Bulley writes that this bird differs from adults as follows: 'Superciliary line pale but distinct lemon-yellow; crown dark chestnut-brown, only slightly darker on the forehead, where the black streaks become more numerous, without any of the bright chestnut of the adults; median line ashy, faintly tinged with yellowish; sides of head and lower throat faintly tinged with yellowish brown, which color extends along the front half of the cervical collar; the black streaks on the back and the bay on the wings less prominent.' He comments further on the bird, writing, 'The yellow superciliary line * * * being so distinct, and contrary to the usual description of the genus, seems to be worthy of the attention of ornithologists.' Coues, as a member of the editorial staff of *The Auk*, remarks in parenthesis concerning Bulley's note: 'This is another case of *Passerculus caboti*.'

"The next published reference to *Passerculus caboti* appears in Ridgway's 'Birds of North and Middle America,' part I, p. 384, under the synonymy of *Melospiza georgiana*, where he refers to the Nahant bird as an immature *M. georgiana* with a 'yellow tinge to the head.'

"Regarding the *Passerculus caboti*, I learn from Mr. Ridgway that he and Professor Baird discussed the matter of a name for the type specimen in question, and that he (Mr. Ridgway), as he recalls the matter, suggested the specific name *caboti*, both believing that it represented a variation of the Swamp Sparrow. Mr. Ridgway also writes: 'Should this prove to be

the case, the name *caboti* would, under the rules, hold as being based on the color figure cited, together with mention in the Birds of North and Middle America * * *.

"From Alexander Wetmore I learn that the Nahant Bird, No. 62373, is represented in the Smithsonian collection only by the head and neck and that it was shot by Dr. Samuel Cabot, Jr., no sex or date given."

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EVENING GROSBEAK RECOVERIES

BY M. J. MAGEE

At my banding station at Sault Ste. Marie, Michigan, I have banded 876 Evening Grosbeaks (*Hesperiphona v. vespertina*), 192 during the present winter, 1927-28.

Out of a total of 684 banded between March 25, 1923, and the present winter, I have reports of five recoveries, as follows:

- 110630 Adult female. Banded March 23, 1924. Killed at St. Charles County of Bellechasse, some twenty-five miles east of the city of Quebec, Canada, March 9, 1926.
- 68450 Adult male. Banded March 15, 1925. Killed by striking a telegraph-wire at McMillan, Michigan, about seventy miles west of the Soo, early in July, 1926.
- 338520 Adult male. Banded March 14, 1925. Trapped at West Hartford, Connecticut, January 30, 1928, by Mrs. H. G. Pratt.
- 393454 Adult male. Banded February 27, 1927. Found at Loretteville, three miles from the city of Quebec, Canada, February 10, 1928, by Mr. M. Verret.
- 462170 Adult female. Banded March 10, 1927. Trapped at Huntington, Massachusetts, February 22, 1928, by Mr. Don V. Messer.*

In addition to these, Mr. Charles L. Whittle has sent me the following Evening Grosbeak recovery records taken from reports of the Bureau of Biological Survey, or from unpublished sources: "The first recorded recovery of a banded Evening Grosbeak was of a bird, No. 10090, banded by Mrs. Alice B. Pratt in Middleborough, Massachusetts, April 27, 1922, which was trapped by George H. Priest in the city of Brockton, Massachusetts, April 3, 1924. Brockton is approximately seventeen miles nearly due north of Middleborough.

*An additional recovery has just been reported by the Biological Survey, namely Evening Grosbeak 482013 banded by me March 26, 1927, was found exhausted by A. H. Roper at Menominee, Michigan, March 17, 1928. Menominee is one hundred and ninety miles south of west of the Soo, just on the Wisconsin line. A letter from Mr. Roper states that the bird died the next day.