

A LOOK AT THE TREE SPARROW IN CALIFORNIA

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Grinnell and Miller (1944) considered the Tree Sparrow (*Spizella arborea*) a rare winter visitor to California, indicating it occurred chiefly in the northeastern plateau region. However, they cite but two records for that region: an undated specimen from Fort Cook, Shasta County, and two specimens, along with others seen, from the area at the north end of Honey Lake, Lassen County, in January and February 1936. In addition they refer to a specimen taken in Pacific Grove, Monterey County, on 13 October 1916, and another specimen taken in Riverside, Riverside County, on 7 February 1888, along with a doubtful record from Butte County and an erroneous record from Alameda County.

Since 1944 additional records have been reported. Stager (1946) reported the capture of an individual that came aboard a ship some 50 miles south of the Golden Gate, and 30 miles offshore, on 14 May 1946. Sabine (1955) indicated a vagrant Tree Sparrow was marked at Deep Springs School, Inyo County, while studying Oregon Juncos (*Junco oreganus*) there during the winter of 1948-49. Wauer (1962) collected one at Furnace Creek Ranch in Death Valley, Inyo County, on 10 November [1961]. VanVelzen (1967) reported the banding of one at Point Reyes, Marin County, on 11 October 1965. McLean (1969) collected one in Deep Springs Valley, Inyo County, on 13 November 1948. In addition *Audubon Field Notes (American Birds* since 1971) contains a number of references to Tree Sparrows in California, and at least two unpublished specimens exist in the Museum of Vertebrate Zoology in Berkeley (see appendix).

Jewett et al. (1953) considered the Tree Sparrow a fairly regular winter resident in eastern Washington from September to April with extreme dates of 7 September and 10 April, and Wahl and Paulson (1972) indicated it also occurs rarely in the lowlands west of the Cascade Range in winter. In Oregon Gabrielson and Jewett (1940) considered the Tree Sparrow an irregular winter visitor east of the Cascades, with but one record for the coast, and all records falling between 23 October and 9 April. Bertrand and Scott (1971) indicated it is rare but regular in eastern Oregon, and accidental along the coast. Strauch (1963) banded one near Corvallis in western Oregon on 18 November 1962. Burleigh (1972) found it to be a fairly common winter resident throughout Idaho with dates of occurrences ranging from 13 October to 11 April.

In Nevada, Linsdale (1951) felt the Tree Sparrow was of more regular occurrence during the winter than the two published reports would indicate. Ryser (1970) considered it a rare winter visitor state-

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wide. Austin and Bradley (1971) listed it as a transient to Clark County in extreme southern Nevada between 20 September and 18 April, undoubtedly based on the records reported by Austin (1969). In Arizona, Phillips et al. (1964) considered the Tree Sparrow an uncommon winter resident to the northern and eastern portion of the state with stragglers recorded south to around San Carlos in Gila County; it appears to be unrecorded in western Arizona south of the Grand Canyon.

With Tree Sparrows occurring regularly in the Great Basin portions of eastern Washington, eastern Oregon and throughout Idaho, and with individuals pushing all the way to southern Nevada and extreme north-western Arizona, it appears likely some would regularly reach eastern California as the birds move south through the Great Basin. In Lassen County Tree Sparrows have been found between 10 December and 5 March with as many as five individuals together; all the records are from the farmland along the northern edge of Honey Lake, and it would not be surprising to learn it is of annual occurrence there. In Inyo County it has been recorded almost annually since 1961, and is undoubtedly regular in very limited numbers, with three together being the largest group so far recorded. All the records fall between 16 October and 22 January with most being for November, and all are from oasis situations. To the south in eastern San Bernardino County there are four recent November records from desert oases indicating some regularity in occurrence. A bird seen near Arvin, Kern County, and another collected in Riverside, Riverside County, had probably reached these locations by moving slightly westward from the Great Basin flight line. Four birds in Imperial County during the late fall and early winter indicate the southern extreme this sparrow has reached when moving south through the Great Basin.

Since Tree Sparrows are rare in coastal Washington and classified as accidental in coastal Oregon one might expect few if any records for coastal California. However, such is not the case, for 26 individuals have so far been reported between Del Norte and San Diego counties. Most of these records are for the fall migration period with extreme dates of 4 October and 4 December. A bird at Olema, Marin County, on 27 December and another in Arcata, Humboldt County, 9 - 11 March 1973, were probably wintering in those areas, and individuals in Mill Valley, Marin County, from 2 January to 9 March, in Santa Cruz, Santa Cruz County, from 10 January to 19 March, and in Arcadia, Los Angeles County, from 30 January to 2 February were clearly wintering locally. The spring records, all from the Farallon Islands and vicinity, are unexplainably late with dates ranging from 4 May to 14 June.

The occurrence of Tree Sparrows in eastern California indicates the western limit of the species' normal migration route and winter range in the Great Basin. Kern, Riverside and Imperial counties are the extreme

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western and southern limits reached by birds moving down the Great Basin. It is interesting that the dates of occurrences for this area of California range from 16 October to 5 March, all within the extremes listed for Washington, Oregon, Idaho and Nevada.

Along the coast of California fall migrant Tree Sparrows appear quite early, compared with those recorded in Washington and Oregon to the north, and with those recorded in eastern California. Eight of the 15 fall migrant records are for October with six of these in early October (4-13 October) including the one from San Diego. Wintering birds apparently depart early in the spring, as would be expected, with records to 9 and 19 March.

The six spring records from the vicinity of the Farallon Islands are unexplainably late, with one actually appearing in June. The latest records for Washington and Oregon are 10 and 9 April respectively, and the latest for Idaho is 11 April. The 18 April record for southern Nevada is exceptionally late with 26 March and 5 April being the other late spring records for that state. There are no records for California between 19 March and 4 May, and there appears to be but the one



Figure 1. Tree Sparrow (*Spizella arborea*) banded on Southeast Farallon Island, San Francisco Co., California on 4 October 1972.

Photo by Bruce Webb

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Nevada record in any of the surrounding states later than early April. Where then do birds come from that establish these May and June records? Bailey and Niedrach (1965) indicated most Tree Sparrows are gone from Colorado by late April, but did cite a record for 21 May, and Bull (1964) indicated it is rare in the New York area after early April with late records for 8 and 12 May. Three of the California records are later than even these extreme dates, and the 14 June record may well be the latest south of the Canadian border.

APPENDIX

All records of Tree Sparrows through the winter of 1972-73 are listed by the counties from which they were reported. Those records for the eastern portion of California are listed first followed by the coastal records. An asterisk (*) indicates records supported by specimens. Individuals seen or collected by the author are so indicated (pers. obs.). Records appearing in *Audubon Field Notes* (AFN) and *American Birds* (AB) are followed by specific references, and two unpublished specimens in the Museum of Vertebrate Zoology in Berkeley (MVZ) are included. In some instances, where more specific information was available to the author, records appearing in AFN and AB have been modified to include this information. All California specimens have been identified as Western Tree Sparrows (*S. a. ochracea*).

Sbasta County - *1 Fort Cook, prior to 1887.

Lassen County - *1 nr. Standish, 8 Jan. 1936; *1 nr. Wendel, 19 Feb. 1936; "some" nr. Wendel, 20 Feb. 1936 (all above from Grinnell and Miller 1944); *1 nr. Wendel, 10 Dec. 1950 (MVZ); 5 nr. Wendel, 5 March 1967 (AFN 21:444, 1967); 6 in two groups nr. Standish, 21 Dec. 1971 (AB 26:506, 1972); 5 nr. Standish, 19 Dec. 1972 (AB 27:510, 1973); 3 nr. Standish, 20 - 21 Dec. 1972 (AB 27:661, 1973).

Inyo County - *1 Deep Springs Valley, 13 Nov. 1948 (McLean 1969); 1 Deep Springs Valley, some time between 24 Oct. 1948 and 25 Jan. 1949 (Sabine 1955); *1 Furnace Creek Ranch, 10 Nov. 1961 (Wauer 1962); 1 Death Valley Nat. Mon., 11 Dec. 1963 (AFN 18:389, 1964); 1 (banded) Emigrant Ranger Station, 23 Nov. 1964 (AFN 19:418, 1965); 1 Emigrant Ranger Station, 27 Dec. 1964 (AFN 19:418, 1965); 1 Furnace Creek Ranch, 24 Nov. 1967 (AFN 22:92, 1968); 1 Emigrant Ranger Station, 7 Dec. 1968 (pers. obs.); *1 nr. Bishop, 1 Nov. 1969 (AFN 24:100c, 1970 - specimen in San Bernardino County Museum); 1 Furnace Creek Ranch, 29 Nov. 1969 (pers. obs.); 3 Furnace Creek Ranch, 17 Oct. 1970 (pers. obs.); 3 Furnace Creek Ranch, 14 Nov. 1970 (pers. obs.); 1 Furnace Creek Ranch, 15 Nov. 1970 (pers. obs.); 1 Mesquite Springs, 18 Nov. 1970 (AB 25:112, 1971); 1 Deep Springs Valley, 16 Oct. 1971 (AB 26:124, 1972); 2 Furnace Creek Ranch, 24 Oct. 1971 (pers. obs.); 2 Furnace Creek Ranch, 13 Nov. 1971 (pers. obs.); 1 Furnace Creek Ranch, 27 Nov. 1971 (AB 26:124, 1972); 1 Furnace Creek Ranch, 22 Jan. 1972 (AB 26:657, 1972); 2 (*1) Deep Springs Valley, 11 Nov. 1972 (AB 27:125, 1973 - specimen in San Bernardino County Museum); 1 Mesquite Springs, 23 Nov. 1972 (AB 27:125, 1973); 1 Furnace Creek Ranch, 26 Nov. 1972 (pers. obs.).

San Bernardino County - 1 Saratoga Springs, 28 Nov. 1969 (AFN 24:100c, 1970); 1 nr. Baker, 10 Nov. 1970 (AB 25:112, 1971); 1 Saratoga Springs, 23 Nov. 1971 (AB 26:124, 1972); 1 Kelso, 24 Nov. 1972 (AB 27:125, 1973).

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Kern County - 1 Arvin, 1 Dec. 1968 (AFN 23:112, 1969).

Riverside County - *1 Riverside, 7 Feb. 1888 (Grinnell and Miller 1944).

Imperial County - 1 nr. Bard, 23 Nov. 1968 (AFN 23:91, 1969); *1 nr. Westmorland, 28 Nov. 1968 (pers. obs. - specimen in San Diego Natural History Museum); 1 nr. Westmorland, 26-29 Dec. 1972 (AB 27:665, 1973); 1 nr. Westmorland 28 Jan. 1973 (pers. obs.).

Del Norte County - 1 nr. Klamath, 4 Dec. 1967 (pers. obs.).

Humboldt County - 1 Trinidad, 25 - 26 Oct. 1969 (AFN 24:95, 1970); 1 Bay-side, 25 Nov. 1972 (AB 27:118, 1973); 1 Arcata, 9 - 11 March 1973 (AB 27:661, 1973).

Marin County - 1 Point Reyes, 11 Oct. 1965 (VanVelzen 1967); 1 Mill Valley, 2 Jan. - 9 March 1968 (AFN 22:476, 1968); 1 Two Rock Ranch, 9 Nov. 1969 (AFN 24:95, 1970); 1 Olema, 27 Dec. 1969 (AFN 24:537, 1970); 1 Inverness, 17 - 25 Nov. 1972 (AB 27:661, 1973).

San Francisco County - *1 Southeast Farallon Is., 23 May 1963 (MVZ); 1 Farallon Is., 16 May 1968 (AFN 22:574, 1968); 1 Farallon Is., 3 Nov. 1968 (AFN 23:105, 1969); 1 Farallon Is., 14 Nov. 1968 (AFN 23:105, 1969); 1 Farallon Is., 14 June 1969 (AFN 23:693, 1969); 1 Farallon Is., 4 - 7 May 1971 (AB 25:798, 1971); 1 Farallon Is., 23 - 26 May 1971 (AB 25:798, 1971); 1 Farallon Is., 11 Oct. 1971 (AB 26:118, 1972); 1 Farallon Is., 21 Oct. 1971 (AB 26:118, 1972); 1 (banded) Farallon Is., 4 - 5 Oct. 1972 (Figure 1) (AB 27:118, 1973); 1 Farallon Is., 5 Oct. 1972 (B. Webb pers. comm.).

Santa Cruz County - *1 at sea about 30 miles off Ano Nuevo Point, 14 May 1946 (Stager 1946); 1 Santa Cruz, 10 Jan. - 19 March 1968 (AFN 22:476, 1968).

Monterey County - *1 Pacific Grove, 13 Oct. 1916 (Grinnell and Miller 1944).

Los Angeles County - 1 Arcadia, 30 Jan. - 2 Feb. 1969 (AFN 23:523, 1969); 1 Hollywood, 21 - 22 Nov. 1970 (AB 25:112, 1971).

San Diego County - 1 Point Loma, 11 - 12 Oct. 1970 (pers. obs.).

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Sketch by Tim Manolis