

BLACK-THROATED SPARROW VAGRANTS IN THE PACIFIC NORTHWEST

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Nancy Hunn and I observed a single adult Black-throated Sparrow (*Amphispiza bilineata*) 16 May 1976 at the Pt. Grenville Coast Guard Station, Grays Harbor Co., Washington. The bird was feeding actively on the lawn of the Coast Guard facility with a flock of about five Savannah Sparrows (*Passerculus sandwichensis*), three American Goldfinches (*Carduelis tristis*) and one White-crowned Sparrow (*Zonotrichia leucophrys*). The Coast Guard Station perches on a high promontory facing the Pacific Ocean and surrounded by second growth coniferous forest typical of the coastal Sitka Spruce (*Picea sitchensis*) zone (Franklin and Dyrness 1973: 58-63). Color photographs obtained with the aid of K. C. Johnstone of the U. S. Coast Guard are not of publishable quality but do allow the bird to be identified. Copies of these color slides have been deposited with the Washington Bird Record File at the University of Washington Museum. A sketch drawn while the bird was under observation is also in that file. The following details were recorded at the time of the observation:

The bird was plump, sparrow-shaped with a dark grey conical bill. Its body was scarcely if at all larger than the Am. Goldfinch and noticeably smaller than the Savannah and White-crowned sparrows. However its tail was considerably longer than that of either goldfinch or Savannah Sparrow, being nearly as long as its body. The bird looked more or less like a cross between a junco and a chickadee. The crown was medium grey edged with slate back as far as the eye. There was a broad white superciliary. The lores were black merging into a dark grey face patch broken only by the white lower eyelid. The face patch and crown merged into a grey nape on the side of the head behind the eye. The chin, throat and breast were marked with a black diamond-shaped bib outlined by the white malar stripe and breast. The malar stripe ended about 1 mm short of the bill which was edged all around with black. The sides [of the breast] were pale grey which merged rather abruptly into the white outlining the black bib. The center of the belly to the under tail coverts was whitish. The rear flanks were pale buffy white. The back and wings were clear medium brown without streaking or wing bars. The tail was dark brown, long and square. A white edge on the outer tail feather could be seen when the bird spread its tail (which was not often, hence the white on the tail was difficult to discern). The legs were dark. I heard no vocalizations.

Subsequent attempts to find the bird on 18 and 20 May were unsuccessful. A cold front moved onshore the night before the observation. This may have grounded a group of north-bound migrants. Fair weather following may have allowed this bird to move on.

The Pt. Grenville Black-throated Sparrow record just detailed is the first photographically documented report for the state of Washington. Mattocks, Hunn and Wahl (1976:21) list the species as hypothetical, citing a sight record by W. L. Dawson of two birds near Brooks Lake, Douglas Co., 31 May 1908. A third apparently valid sighting is of a bird on the lawn of the Ohanapechosh Ranger Station, Mount Rainier National Park, 23-24 May 1959. It was observed at close range by rangers Sellers and D. May (USDI 1964; fide W. Harrington-Tweit). Since the Pt. Grenville sighting, a single bird was noted 10 May 1977 south of Walla Walla about 2 km north of the Oregon State line (K. Knittle pers. comm.). These and extralimital records from western Montana, Idaho, British Columbia, Oregon and

NOTES

northern California are summarized in Table 1 and are shown in Figure 1 as open circles. Known breeding sites in Wyoming, Utah, Nevada, southern Idaho, southeastern Oregon and northeastern California are shown as black circles. Records which may indicate breeding, at least on a casual basis, are shown as half-dark, half-open circles and the potential breeding range is outlined with dashes.

A single report of a bird beyond its normal range is of little note unless it can be shown to reflect a more general pattern, in which case it is no longer an "accidental" occurrence. Thirty-one of 35 (89%) individual vagrant Black-throated Sparrows in this region appeared between 6 May and 10 June and 22 (63%) of



Figure 1. Black-throated Sparrow distribution in the Pacific Northwest. Open circles show locations of vagrants. Black circles show breeding sites. Circles half-black, half-open show locations of possible breeding birds on the periphery of the species' known breeding range. The known breeding range is outlined by the solid black line; the potential breeding range by the dashed line.

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Table 1. Potential breeding and vagrant Black-throated Sparrow records for the Pacific Northwest. *Audubon Field Notes* and *American Birds* are abbreviated AFN and AB.

		SOURCE
BRITISH COLUMBIA		
8 June 1959	Murtle Lake, Wells Gray Provincial Park (1, specimen)	Godfrey 1966:389
MONTANA		
10 June 1968	Missoula, Missoula Co. (1)	AFN 22:632
21 May 1975	Near Missoula (1, photographed)	AB 29:885
IDAHO		
Potential breeding	Near Ellis, Pahsimeroi Valley	Burleigh 1972:411
Potential breeding	Cassia Co.	Burleigh 1972:411
6 May 1953	Rathdrum, Kootenai Co. (1, specimen)	Burleigh 1972:411
WASHINGTON		
31 May 1908	Near Brooks Lake, Douglas Co. (2)	Mattocks, Hunn and Wahl 1976:21
23-24 May 1959	Ohanapecosh Ranger Station, Mt. Rainier National Park (1)	USDI 1964
16 May 1976	Pt. Grenville, Grays Harbor Co. (1, photo)	AB 30:882
10 May 1977	Near Walla Walla, Walla Walla Co. (1)	AB 31:1027
OREGON*		
Potential breeding	Wright's Point, Harney Co.	Gabrielson and Jewett 1970:565; Dubois 1959:435; AB 31:1165
Potential breeding	Silver Lake, Harney Co.	Gabrielson and Jewett 1970:565
Potential breeding	Lake Abert, Lake Co.	T. Manolis pers. comm.
Potential breeding	Nilakshi Ridge, Klamath Co.	Brown 1960:220-221
16 May 1959	Beaverton, Washington Co. (1)	Dubois 1959:435
17-19 May 1959	Baker, Baker Co. (1)	AFN 13:390
28 May 1959	Milwaukie, Clackamas Co. (2)	Dubois 1959:435
Shortly before 4 June 1959	Depoe Bay, Lincoln Co. (1)	Dubois 1959:435
ca. 4 June 1966	Brothers, Deschutes Co. (1)	AFN 20:588
23 May 1970	Lebanon, Linn Co. (1, specimen)	AFN 24:638
23 May 1970	On coast, Curry Co. (1)	AFN 24:638
30 May-2 July 1970	Roxy Ann Butte, Jackson Co. (3+, 2 banded)	AFN 24:638, 711
18 May 1975	Portland, Multnomah Co. (1)	AB 29:901

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Table 1 (cont)

		SOURCE
31 May 1975	Roxy Ann Butte (1)	AB 29:901
26 April 1977	Near Florence, Lane Co. (1, photo)	AB 31:1040
CALIFORNIA** (spring records west of the Sierra Nevada)		
Potential breeding	Near Honey Lake, Lassen Co.	AB 29:21
6 June 1959	Near Patterson Pass, Santa Clara Co. (2)	McCaskie and DeBenedictis 1966:28
12 May 1972	Near Arcata, Humboldt Co. (1)	AB 26:807
14-20 May 1972	Pacific Grove, Monterey Co. (1, photo)	J. Winter pers. comm.
17 April 1974	Farallon Is., San Francisco Co.(1)	AB 28:850
12 May-6 June 1974	Near Chico, Butte Co. (4)	AB 28:850
16 May 1975	Near Chico (1)	AB 29:906
12-31 May 1977	Farallon Is. (2)	AB 31:1045

* A report of 12 seen 10 April 1975 near Finley National Wildlife Refuge, Benton Co., Oregon (AB 29:901), seems unlikely and is without supporting details. A report of potential breeding near Hampton, Deschutes Co. (AB 27:896), was based on song only and has not been verified (H. Nehls pers. comm.).

** Most northern California reports were summarized by Jon Winter (pers. comm.) from the *American Birds* regional editors' files. In addition to those listed there are eight fall reports, including six from the Farallon Islands, and two winter reports. Of nine reports from the Sierra Nevada, one is for fall, one for winter and the remainder between 3 May and 28 June.

these individuals were noted during the latter half of May. These contrast with typical mid-April arrivals at northern California breeding sites (McCaskie and DeBenedictis 1966:28). Most of these vagrant birds quickly move on. Almost all reports involve single birds or pairs, and most are far from suitable habitat. In short, these individuals appear to have overshot the mark during spring migration and to have been wandering for some time.

There may also be a greater tendency for vagrancy of this type in certain years. Three or more reports have been noted in four years (1959, 1970, 1975 and 1977) with a total of seven sightings from four states in the spring of 1959, the year of the Canadian record. The spring of 1959 was characterized by severe drought from the southwest (Monson 1959, Small 1959) to the northwestern extremity of the Black-throated Sparrow's breeding range at Malheur National Wildlife Refuge in Oregon (Scott 1959). The widespread drought conditions of the winter of 1976 brought three sightings from as many states. The two northern California coastal sightings in 1972 coincided with a drought restricted to the southwest. However 1970, which saw three reports, was characterized as cool, and 1975, with four reports, was an extremely cold and wet spring throughout the western United States.

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In conclusion, drought conditions in the Black-throated Sparrow's breeding range may increase the probability of the vagrancy pattern described here. However other factors may also increase that probability.

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