

February's **At a Glance** bird is obviously a sparrow species, many of which can be challenging to identify, even for the most experienced observer. The first point to notice on the mystery sparrow is that it is streaked below and appears to have a relatively short tail. The fine, pale ventral streaks, along with the short tail and thin malar (jaw) stripe all suggest that the bird is not a Song Sparrow. The rather short bill and seemingly pale coloration eliminate the Seaside Sparrow as a possibility. Likewise, the Sharp-tailed Sparrow is not a candidate, because the pictured bird lacks a solid (gray) crown, and it fails to show a neatly defined, dark ear patch clearly offset by a broad (ocher) eyebrow stripe and a similar streak under the ear patch. Many races of the Sharp-tailed Sparrow would also show more prominent white back stripes and a flatter-headed profile than the pictured bird. The bold eyebrow stripe along with the presence of a pale median stripe on the crown remove the otherwise similar-looking Vesper Sparrow as a prospect.

With Song, Seaside, Sharp-tailed, and Vesper sparrows out of the running, only Savannah, Fox, and Lincoln's sparrows remain as possibilities from the list of commonly occurring Massachusetts sparrow species that have heavily streaked underparts. This assumes, however, that the mystery bird is in adult plumage, since most sparrow species have streaked underparts in juvenal plumage. The short tail, whiteness of the eye stripe, and the thin median crown stripe all serve to discount Lincoln's Sparrow. The robust Fox Sparrow, on the other hand, would exhibit a much fuller-chested appearance and a heavier bill, and the flank stripes would be darker and more chevron-like in appearance. Thus, assuming that the bird pictured is in adult plumage (which it is), we are left with Savannah Sparrow (*Passerculus sandwichensis*) as the identity of the mystery bird. Collectively, the median crown stripe, broad pale eye stripe, streaked underparts, short tail, obviously pale legs, and lack of conspicuous wing bars all clinch the identification. The pale tone of the bird's back and ventral stripes and the width of the eye stripe suggest that the sparrow is of the *princeps* race -- the "Ipswich" Savannah Sparrow from Sable Island, Nova Scotia.



"Ipswich" (Savannah) Sparrow

Photographed by Roger Everett
near Coast Guard Station
Eastham, on Cape Cod
after heavy storm
in October

AT A GLANCE

Photo by Oliver Komar



Can you identify this bird?

Identification will be discussed in next issue's AT A GLANCE.

We give avid birders something few binocular and telescope stores can.

Help.

We at the F.C. Meichsner Co. don't just talk to our customers about optical equipment. We *listen* to them, too.

And when you've been listening to people for 72 years, you can't help but learn a thing or two.

Like what birders want in a pair of binoculars—and what they don't.

So when you're about ready for a new spotting scope, binoculars, or repairs on equipment you already own, give us a call.

We accept most major credit cards, and we'd be happy to let you do most of the talking.



F.C. Meichsner Co.

182 Lincoln St., Boston, MA 02111
(617) 426-7092

