

TIDAL MARSH SPARROWS

Ken Blankenship

During 1-5 January and 19-21 February, a concerted effort was made to study wintering *Ammodramus* sparrows in Georgia's coastal marshes. Biologists, conservation groups, and volunteers spent time at banding sites in St Catherines Sound, Wolf Island NWR, St Simons Sound and St Andrews Sound helping to capture, measure, and band the birds in an effort to better understand the relative abundance of the different subspecies of the "sharp-tailed" sparrows: Nelson's Sparrow and Saltmarsh Sparrow. In the process, other interesting data surfaced concerning habitat preference, subspecies segregation, and site fidelity (Tim Keyes, GA Department of Natural Resources; Fletcher Smith, Center for Conservation Biology, College of William and Mary, Williamsburg, VA; Charlie Muise, Georgia Important Bird Areas program).

Out of 118 banded sharp-tailed sparrows, 72 were Nelson's and 46 were Saltmarsh. In addition, 176 Seaside Sparrows were banded. Interestingly, the results of this effort indicate that the local breeding subspecies of Seaside Sparrow (*Ammodramus maritimus macgillivraii*) appears to be strongly outnumbered by the wintering subspecies that breeds farther north (*A.m. maritimus*).

One banding station along U.S. Hwy 17 near Jekyll Island held an impressive concentration of all 3 species on 19-20 February, leaving volunteers and biologists alike in awe of the spectacle of scores of normally furtive and elusive birds "rolling" along through dense stands of black needle rush (*Juncus roemerianus*): 30+ Nelson's Sparrows, 15+ Saltmarsh Sparrows, and an incredible 250+ Seaside Sparrows.

FOX SPARROW - A good winter for this species statewide included several records from the Coastal Plain. A high count of 28 came from northern Greene Co. on 30 January (Paul Sykes).

LINCOLN'S SPARROW - Singles were found on U.S. Department of Agriculture property in Oconee Co. during the Athens CBC on 18 December (James Neves). Singles were also found at the Cobb Co. owl fields on 15 January (Larry Gridley) and at AWMA on 24 January (Paul Lehman, Lydia Thompson).

HARRIS'S SPARROW - One was found on 30 December at AWMA, and was present until at least 24 February (Anne Waters, Lois Stacey, m. ob., GCRC 2011-03).

Harris's Sparrow, McIntosh Co., 31 December, by Larry Gridley



WHITE-CROWNED SPARROW - A new statewide CBC high count of 181 reflected the excellent numbers seen this winter. A noteworthy count of 55 was made along PCR on 23 January (Ken Blankenship).

ROSE-BREASTED GROSBEAK - Single birds were found at feeders in Oconee, Washington Co., on 1 December (Lynn Schlup); Buford, Gwinnett Co., on 3 December (Karen Theodorou); Bibb Co. on 4 December (Jerry Amerson); and on SCI on 17 December (Nathan Farnau).

PAINTED BUNTING - One female type was in a backyard on Skidaway Island, Chatham Co., on 8 December (Beth Roth). A male and female at a feeder in Dougherty Co. had been present since October, and were still present at the end of the period (*vide* Larry Gridley). One visited a feeder on Wilmington Island, Chatham Co., in late January (Doug Thigpen), and one was at AWMA on 17 February (Kent Davis).

DICKCISSEL - One was found on U.S. Department of Agriculture property in Oconee Co. on the Athens CBC on 18 December (James Neves), and was still present on 21 December (m. ob.).

RED-WINGED BLACKBIRD - An impressive estimated count of 2,000,000 birds was reported from BUENWR on 16 December (Joel McNeal).

YELLOW-HEADED BLACKBIRD - One was at Lake Seminole on 4 December (Roy Brown, Melissa Martin). A male was found in a large mixed blackbird flock in Dalton, Whitfield Co., on 18 December (David DesRochers).

RUSTY BLACKBIRD - A conservative count of 310 was made along Cook's Trail, Clarke Co., on 7 December (Joel McNeal).

BREWER'S BLACKBIRD - A maximum of 120 were reported in the regular wintering spots on the BCL on 23 January (Ken Blankenship, Joel McNeal), with singles reported from Gordon Co. on 5-11 December (m. ob.) and 4 from Murray Co. on 23 December (Bill Lotz). Two were in Dougherty Co. on 1 December (Tod Lanier, Wayne Schaffner). Eight were seen in Greene Co. on the Lake Oconee CBC on 20 December (Jeff Sewell), and 75 on the Dublin CBC on 27 December (Jerry Amerson).

BOAT-TAILED GRACKLE - Three were well inland in Lee Co. on 19 January (Tod Lanier, Wayne Schaffner).

ORCHARD ORIOLE - The long-staying bird at Lake Herrick, Clarke Co., was last seen on 4 December (Richard Hall).

PURPLE FINCH - Substantial numbers were reported throughout the state. An impressive 250 were at feeders in Oconee, Washington Co., on 25 January (Lynn Schlup).

RED CROSSBILL - Birds were heard along Burrell's Ford Road, Rabun Co., on 31 December (Krista Gridley, Darlene Moore, Dan Vickers). One was seen in mixed pine-hardwood forest in northern Greene Co. on 31 January (Paul Sykes, Tom Heatley).

PINE SISKIN - This species was also seen all over the state in good numbers, as far south as Valdosta on 31 December (Karen Seward). The high count of 160 came from Oconee, Washington Co., on 26 December (Lynn Schlup).

EVENING GROSBEAK - A female was first seen at a feeder in Dalton, Whitfield Co., in early December, and was last reported on 26 December (Ruth Stokes, m. ob., pending, GCRC 2012-14). This irruptive winter visitor has previously been recorded in its thousands in the late 1960s, but has been extremely rare in the state in recent years. Prior to this bird, the last Georgia record was from Fannin Co. in January 2005.



Evening Grosbeak, Whitfield Co., 17 December, by David Hollie

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