

## American Birds plans a new series on breeding behavior

**B**EGINNING WITH the next—March, 1982—issue of *American Birds*, we will inaugurate a series of illustrated articles that will substantially broaden the scope of *American Birds*' interests. Each article in the series will be a pictorial essay with accompanying text, on the breeding behavior of a single species of North or South American birds.

With the exception of one very memorable article entitled *Leks, Sex, and Buff-breasted Sandpipers* (Volume 33 Number 6) by J. P. Myers, *American Birds* has left bird behavior largely to other journals (although with many a behavioral note tucked into an "S.A."), and concentrated on distribution, migration, population, rare occurrence,

identification, and of course, our unique continental record of field reports. But in considering behavioral articles, we realized that there is much exciting material to be published, that with our capability for color illustration, we could do better than anyone, and the question became "Why not?"

We will, at least for the foreseeable future, eschew the kind of behavioral paper that centers so largely around statistical studies. We will not compete with *Auk* and *Condor* for such papers. Our series will depend largely on pictures to tell the story (if budget permits, we may even also provide sound tracks).

The series will be the special project

of J. P. Myers, who has been appointed Editor, Special Projects, strangely enough, and by even greater coincidence, the first article in the new series will be written and illustrated by the very same J. P. Myers, and intriguingly entitled "The promiscuous Pectoral Sandpiper."

We welcome "Pete" Myers to the staff, and the series to our pages. Authors, or potential authors, of possible numbers in the series are invited to contact Dr. Myers at the Philadelphia Academy of Sciences, 19th and The Parkway, Philadelphia, PA 19103 Telephone: (215) 299-1181.

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## Thirteenth in the Fuertes print series

[The original painting was reproduced in *Bird-Lore*, Volume XII, Number 23, May-June 1910. Distribution notes have been abridged from the A.O.U. Check-List, 5th Edition (1955), but the Chapman text has been unchanged except for a taxonomic update.]

### Sharp-tailed Sparrow *Ammospiza caudacuta*

Northeastern British Columbia, southern MacKenzie, central Saskatchewan and central Manitoba south to southern Alberta and North Dakota; James Bay; Atlantic coast from lower St. Lawrence Valley south to North Carolina. Winters on the Gulf coast from southern Texas to Florida, and on the Atlantic coast from New York to southern Florida.

### Seaside Sparrow *Ammospiza maritima*

Salt marshes of the Atlantic Coast from Massachusetts

south to northern Florida, and of the Gulf coast from southern Texas to central peninsular Florida. Migrant in part in winter from the northern limits of the breeding range.

### Dusky Seaside Sparrow *Ammospiza nigrescens*

Resident in salt marshes of eastern Orange and northern Brevard counties, central eastern Florida (Persimmon Hammock on St. Johns River, near Indian River City, and Titusville, Merritt's Island). Total population, 5 males, now (1982) in captivity in Gainesville, Florida.

## Notes on the Plumage of North American Sparrows

By FRANK M. CHAPMAN

**Sharp-tailed Sparrow** *A. caudacuta caudacuta* (Fig. 1). The pronounced buff markings, brown crown stripes, and striking pattern of the upper parts, are among the most characteristic features of the Sharp-tail in fresh plumage. Worn summer birds lose much of the buff on the breast and sides, which are then more sharply streaked, but the buff on the sides of the head is still conspicuous.

The nestling differs greatly from the adult, being entirely rich buff below, usually more or less streaked on the breast and sides; the upper parts are dark blackish brown, the feathers of the back, the wing coverts and tertials being widely margined with yellowish brown. This plumage, as Dwight has shown, is worn from the time the bird leaves the nest in late June or early July, until September or early Octo-

ber, when, with the exception of the primaries, the primary coverts and the secondaries (and sometimes all these), it is molted and replaced by the first winter plumage, which resembles that of the bird figured, and is indistinguishable from that of the adult in winter plumage.

As is usual with sedge-inhabiting birds, the effects of wear are soon apparent, and midwinter specimens are as faded and worn as those of midsummer. Breeding plumage is therefore acquired by a complete molt in March and April, when the bird again acquires a plumage resembling that of fall. By the latter part of May, the effects of wear and fading are apparent, and midsummer specimens are almost white below, while the upper parts are dingy olive, almost if not wholly unmarked.

The seasonal changes in the plumage of both Nelson's Sharp-tail *A. caudacuta nelsoni* (Fig. 2) and the Acadian Sharp-tail *A. caudacuta subvirgata* (Fig. 3) are similar to those just described. The first named differs from the Sharp-tail (Fig. 1) chiefly in being unstreaked or but lightly streaked below, in having the upper parts richer and browner in tone, with the scapular markings whiter and more pronounced, and in its smaller size.

The Acadian Sharp-tail (Fig. 3) is the palest of the three races. It is always streaked below, but the streaks are dusky and not sharply defined; the buff is much less rich and the back is grayer and greener, as the figure clearly shows.

In worn summer plumage the New Brunswick specimens are markedly different from Shoal Lake, Manitoba, specimens of Nelson's Sharp-tail, the upper parts of the latter bird at this season showing the effects of wear and fading but little.

Nestling specimens of the Acadian Sharp-tail are usually unstreaked below. The nestling plumage of Nelson's Sharp-tail appears never to have been described.

**Seaside Sparrow** *A. maritima maritima* (Fig. 5). The Seaside is a greenish gray bird with a yellow loreal mark, with indistinct dusky streaks and a faint wash of buff on the breast and sides. In worn plumage the buff disappears, but the back is still greenish gray and unlike that of any of our other sparrows.

The nestling is wholly unlike the adult. Its breast and sides are a pronounced buff, conspicuously streaked with blackish; the upper parts are grayish brown streaked with black. As with the Sharp-tail; the bird wears this plumage from the time it leaves the nest in late June until August or September,

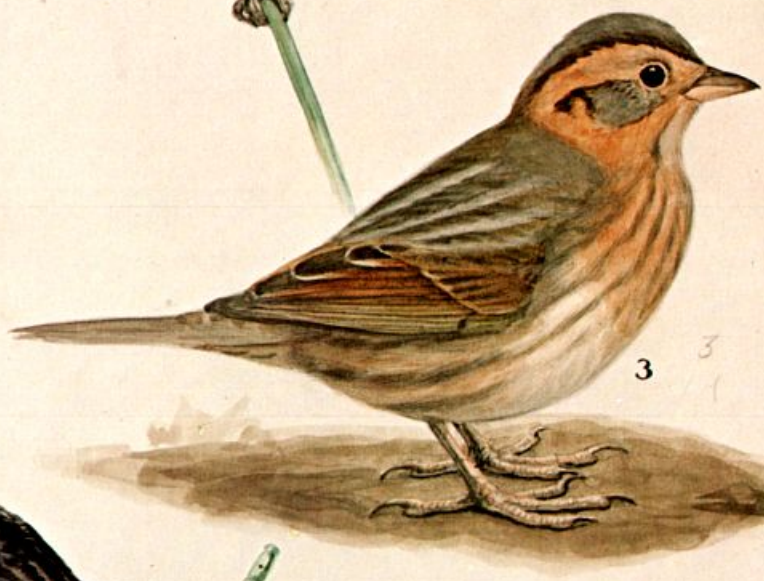
when, by molt of all the feathers, except primaries and secondaries (and possibly in some cases even them), the first winter plumage is acquired.

The adult passes into winter plumage by a complete molt in August, after which it is indistinguishable from the young bird. This is the plumage-figured (Fig. 5).

Unlike the Sharp-tail, the Seaside has no spring molt. Its plumage, however, shows the effect of wear, and fading much less than does that of the Sharp-tail. Long Island specimens taken as late as the middle of May are still in comparatively fresh plumage, but after that date the change to worn breeding plumage comes quickly.

The four southern races of our northern Seaside Sparrow are all of about the same size, and are smaller than our [northeastern] bird. They are sometimes distinguished with difficulty, but, since they are largely residents and are confined to our South Atlantic and Gulf coasts, they do not come within the experience of many ornithologists. For our present purposes we may simply say that MacGillivray's Seaside, *A. maritima macgillivrayi*, inhabits the coast of South Carolina and Georgia, where its relationship with Scott's Seaside, *A. maritima peninsulae*, are not clearly understood. The latter alone inhabits the west coast of Florida, and doubtless extends west to Louisiana, when it is replaced by the darker Fisher's Seaside, *A. maritima fisheri*, which is most nearly related to Macgillivray's Seaside. On the south Texas coast we have Sennett's Seaside, *A. maritima sennetti*, which, although most widely separated geographically, is still most like our northern bird. The A.O.U. Check-List includes two subspecies not shown here: *A. maritima pelonota*, said to be resident in salt marshes of northeastern Florida from Amelia Island to New Smyrna, and *A. maritima juncicola*, resident in the coastal marshes of the northern Gulf coast from Escambia Bay to southern Taylor County.

**Black Seaside Finch** [Dusky Seaside Sparrow] *A. nigrescens* (Fig. 4). I have seen only March specimens of this little known bird, but it is not improbable that its plumage changes correspond with those of the northern Seaside. It is confined to the marshes of northern Indian River, chiefly on Merritt's Island, and has never been seen, I believe, north of the Haulover Canal. I have seen no specimens of the northern forms south of Matanzas Inlet, and if as appears, the ranges of these two birds do not come together, the Black Seaside is an isolated race, a fact which may in part account for its strongly marked characters.



R. Puertes.