

FIRST RECORDS OF THE RACE *SCOTTII* OF THE RUFIOUS-CROWNED SPARROW IN CALIFORNIA

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On 22 May 1976 Remsen heard a singing Rufous-crowned Sparrow (*Aimophila ruficeps*) at 6000 ft (1825 m) in Live Oak Canyon, New York Mountains, northeastern San Bernardino County, California, about 19 km from the Nevada border. Attempts to see the bird failed. On 28 and 29 July 1976 Remsen returned to the area and again located a Rufous-crowned Sparrow, singing from the same slope as in the May observation. This time the bird was seen and studied in detail (McCaskie 1976). In late May 1977 at least three singing birds were found in the Keystone Canyon-Live Oak Canyon area of the New York Mountains by Stephen F. and Karen L. Bailey, Cardiff and Remsen. The authors found one still present on 20 June 1977, when Cardiff succeeded in obtaining a specimen (male with enlarged testes; San Bernardino County Museum 30001). It was subsequently identified as *A. r. scottii* by Ned K. Johnson and Remsen by comparison with the large series of North American races of this sparrow at the Museum of Vertebrate Zoology. The dates of occurrence and consistent presence of singing birds at a single locality indicate local nesting, although no direct evidence was obtained.

This is the first record from California of *A. r. scottii*, which breeds from northwestern and north-central Arizona and southwestern New Mexico south to south-central Arizona, northeastern Sonora, and northwestern Chihuahua (AOU Check-list 1957; Phillips, Marshall and Monson 1964). Small populations of *scottii* have also been found in the Zion area of southwestern Utah (Wauer 1965, Hayward et al. 1976), and there are several sight records from southern Nevada (C. S. Lawson pers. comm.), presumably of *scottii*. There have been two previous sight and one photographic record of Rufous-crowned Sparrows from east of the Sierra Nevada in California: one photographed on 25 Nov. 1972 by E. H. and Donna Johnson on the trail to Crystal Spring (about 43 km southwest of Live Oak Canyon) near the headquarters of Mitchell Caverns State Park, Providence Mountains, San Bernardino Co. (photos on file at San Bernardino Co. Museum); two in a canyon just north of the headquarters of Mitchell Caverns State Park on 25 March 1975 by Steve Forsell (McCaskie 1976); and one at Scotty's Castle, Death Valley National Monument, Inyo Co., on 8 May 1974 by Richard Stallcup (McCaskie 1974). The subspecies involved in these sightings is unknown, but *scottii* is the most likely. The other races occurring in California (*ruficeps*, *canescens* and *obscura*) are highly sedentary and have never been recorded east of the Sierra (Grinnell and Miller 1944). The race *rupicola*, a southwestern Arizona form darker and grayer than *scottii*, could also potentially occur in California.

In the Live Oak Canyon-Keystone Canyon area, Rufous-crowned Sparrows were found singing from 5440 to 6000 ft (1650 to 1825 m) on steep slopes with open Singleleaf Pinyon (*Pinus monophylla*) woodland, scattered, small, rock outcrops, and open areas with patches of grass 30-100 cm in height. A sparse layer of small shrubs was irregularly distributed on the slopes. In the gullies at the foot of the slopes were dense thickets of Scrub Oak (*Quercus dumosa*), Canyon Live Oak (*Quercus chrysolepis*), Desert Almond (*Prunus fasciculata*), and Ashy Silk-tassel (*Garrya flavescens*). Most observations were on south-facing slopes. Permanent water was found within 1 km at Keystone Spring and Live Oak Spring. The most common breeding birds at this locality were (in approximate descending order of abundance): Bewick's Wren (*Thryo-*

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manes bewickii), Blue-gray Gnatcatcher (*Poliophtila caerulea*), Plain Titmouse (*Parus inornatus*), Bushtit (*Psaltriparus minimus*), Gray Vireo (*Vireo vicinior*), Black-throated Gray Warbler (*Dendroica nigrescens*) and Scrub Jay (*Aphelocoma coerulescens*). We have spent hundreds of hours in other areas of the New York Mountains and the adjacent Mid Hills without finding Rufous-crowned Sparrows. R. Kent Johnson (pers. comm.) spent over 3 months in the nearby Granite Mountains and did not see this species, nor have moderate amounts of field work in the Clark and Kingston ranges to the north of the New York Mountains by Ned K. Johnson, the authors, and many others produced any records. Thus we are reasonably certain that the Rufous-crowned Sparrow is not present, or at least not widespread, elsewhere in the region, although little information is available from the Providence Mountains, the location of two of the previous records.

Two possible explanations for the apparent restriction of Rufous-crowned Sparrows to the Live Oak Canyon-Keystone Canyon area are: (1) this is the only area suitable for this species, and (2) this species has only recently begun to colonize the region. We do not favor the first hypothesis. Habitat seemingly identical to that on the slopes of these canyons is widespread throughout the mountain ranges mentioned above as well as elsewhere in the New Yorks. Many of these localities have water permanently available at springs. Live Oak and Keystone canyons do have extensive patches of oaks, which are not present at most other localities; however, other canyons with oaks, such as Sagamore, Caruthers and Fourth of July, all in the New York Mountains, lack Rufous-crowned Sparrows. Furthermore, this species was never noted in the oaks themselves.

Recent colonization seems to be a more plausible explanation. Cardiff had visited this area during May and June several times during the previous 10 years without noting this species. Several other species of southwestern birds are currently in the process of extending their ranges northward and westward (Johnson and Garrett 1974), and the Rufous-crowned Sparrow may be part of this general pattern. Perhaps it is not coincidental that the Live Oak Canyon-Keystone Canyon area is at the extreme eastern edge of the New York Mountains, making it the closest locality in California to source populations in Arizona.

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