

NOTES

FIRST RECORD OF Le CONTE'S SPARROW IN OREGON

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Gilligan spotted Oregon's first Le Conte's Sparrow (*Ammodramus leconteii*) while birding with Schmidt, Irons and Smith on 27 Sep 1983, in the tiny oasis town of Fields, Harney Co. We first saw the bird around 0900 in 3 m high willows (*Salix* sp.) along the creek that flows through town. These trees were filled with migrating passerines including a Blackpoll Warbler (*Dendroica striata*) and a Clay-colored Sparrow (*Spizella pallida*), both vagrants in Oregon. The record has been submitted to the Oregon Bird Records Committee.

The Le Conte's Sparrow soon disappeared into a nearby swale, mostly grassy with small willows and brush that had been killed 2 years earlier by fire. We saw it many times over the next 6 hours, in some cases getting views as long as a minute but usually just catching glimpses. One diagnostic photograph (Figure 1) was obtained when the bird was flushed onto a small snag. The click of the camera shutter frightened the bird back into the grass.



Figure 1. Le Conte's Sparrow, Fields, Harney Co., Oregon, 27 Sep 1983.

Photo by Jeff Gilligan

NOTES

This description was taken from field notes prepared by Irons and Gilligan immediately after the sighting: Size—small, about the size of a Lincoln's Sparrow (*Melospiza lincolni*). Head—very pale central crown stripe bordered by a distinct blackish line on each side; broad, bright orange-buff supercilium; black postocular streak; distinct gray ear patch; lower face orange-buff, somewhat paler than supercilium. Bill—short, conical. Eye—large, dark. Nape—grayish, streaked with reddish-brown. Chest—orange-buff. Sides—orangish, well streaked with dark brown. Abdomen—whitish. Back—feathers blackish-brown, broadly edged with buff, forming several broad buffy lines running the length of the back. Wings—brown, feather fringes paler brown. Tail—short; undertail—orangish-buff.

The broad buff streaks on the blackish-brown back, the distinct gray earpatch, and the orange-buff supercilium eliminate any race of the Grasshopper Sparrow (*Ammodramus savannarum*). The distinct gray earpatch, the streaked nape, the pale crown stripe, and the broadness and buffy color of the back streaks eliminate the inland race of the Sharp-tailed Sparrow (*Ammodramus caudacutus nelsoni*).

Le Conte's Sparrow breeds as far west as southern Mackenzie, east-central British Columbia, and north-central Montana (Godfrey 1979, AOU 1983). It migrates regularly through the Great Plains to its wintering grounds in south-central and southeastern United States (Terres 1980, AOU 1983). The AOU (1983) lists Le Conte's Sparrow as "casual west to Washington, Idaho . . . and California," but Burleigh (1972) calls it rare in Idaho, "apparently of casual occurrence in the northern part of the state," with only one documented record. Washington has two records, one of a bird that killed itself against a window in Kennewick, Benton Co., on 29 May 1964 (Roberson 1980, Weber and Larrison 1977), and one of a bird seen 15 Nov 1982 at Willapa National Wildlife Refuge in Pacific Co. (Hunn and Mattocks 1983). Roberson (1980) lists seven records for California, six of which he considered to be fall vagrants. The earliest was 13 Oct 1970, on Southeast Farallon Island.

Winds were from the southwest on the morning this bird was seen. In fall 1983, as in fall 1982 when we birded the same area on about the same date, "eastern" vagrants were seen at Fields during periods of southwest winds.

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