

Should go
with '90 records

56-91-84

Shawneen Finnegan
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56-90-73

9 March 1991

Dear Hugh:

Enclosed is my ~~description~~ of the "stakeout" Le Conte's Sparrows in southeastern Colorado, at the western upper end of John Martin Reservoir, which I saw with Paul when we were there on 6 March 1991. I wished I had not left my camera in the car as the third sparrow sat up right in front of us, so close I could not focus my binoculars. Grumble....not often does one see Le Conte's so well and get "walkaway" looks at that!

Observations: Found in reedy/weedy/grassy marsh habitat typical of what Le Conte's Sparrows prefer. Having just seeing Le Conte's Sparrows in several different states, this seemed perfect for them. We saw three individuals, two of which I saw very well. Bird #1 flew across a channel only allowing me a glimpse of it in flight. Given the spikey-tailed, pale and streaked-backed appearance, and its weak flight, I did not have a problem calling that bird a Le Conte's Sparrow. Paul had a better look, as he was in between me and this bird. Birds #2 and 3 both sat teed-up, giving us great to outrageous views. Bird #3 was incredibly cooperative, posing for five minutes, switching positions on its twig to present both front and back views. The following description applies for the latter two birds.

Both birds showed the following: medium to small, flat-headed sparrows with strongly marked plumage. Central crown stripe white, but buffy at the forehead. Lateral crown strips very dark brown to black. Supercilium orangey. Behind the eye was an elongated black triangle pointing towards the nape. Cheek patch gray. Throat, sides of breast, breast, and flanks an apricot-orange color. Flanks streaked with dark brown to black spots. Belly white. The nape was a purplish color with tiny grayish feather tips interspersed. The back was dark brown with two pale mantle streaks; scapular centers were dark brown with paler warm brown edgings. No wing bars on brown wings. Tail a light brown with spikey points to the tips. Flesh colored legs. Eyes dark.


Shawneen Finnegan

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P.O. Box 1061
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9 March 1991

Dear Hugh,

I've just returned home from four weeks on the road, the last couple birding days of which were spent in southeastern Colorado--specifically in the Arkansas River valley. Here are some of the highlights of that visit. While they were actually seen in early March, they represent wintering birds so I thought I'd send them to you now for the winter season report. (A couple sightings of early spring migrants--e.g., 48 Ross' Geese with Snows near Las Animas on March 6--I'll wait to send in with my spring report.)

One disturbing event that occurred while we were visiting Holly on March 5 was a wildfire that started by people burning straw in 50 mph winds burned the riparian along the Arkansas River from Holly all the way to at least the Kansas line. The larger trees were singed but probably largely survived, but 90% of the undergrowth was charred.

Do you pass on descriptions of rarities to the Colorado records committee? If so, could you pass on the Le Conte's description below?

Northern Shrike- 7 between John Martin Reservoir and Trinidad, March 6
(are there usually so many in southeast CO? This "late"?
Most were in grassland with scattered junipers between
La Junta and Trinidad.)

Le Conte's Sparrow- 3 stakeouts still present near Fort Lyon (upper end of
John Martin Reservoir), March 5-6

(Description from field notes: Three stakeout
individuals seen in marshy area above upper end of
John Martin Res. near Fort Lyon. Two seen extremely
well, the third only in flight. Weak flying, pale,
spikey-tailed sparrows. Bold orangeish supercilium,
black lateral crown stripes, thinner light median
crown stripe--buffy anteriorly, turning whitish
posteriorly. Contrasting purplish-russet nape.
Blackish back with buffy back stripes. Black
scalloping on uppertail coverts. Nice buffy malar and
throat and breast region. Cheek a blue-gray color.
Bold blackish streaks to sides of breast and flanks.
Silent.)

Swamp Sparrow- 2 stakeouts still near Fort Lyon, March 5-6

Harris' Sparrow- 2 near Holly, March 5 (habitat burned up several hours
later)

Paul Lehman

--Paul Lehman