

WV BIRD RECORDS COMMITTEE REPORT FORM

Please Type or Print Legibly

Species: Number: (leave blank)

Location: Date: Time:

Bird Seen: To: Age/Sex:

Description: In lieu of physical material substantiating a record (e.g., specimen, diagnostic photograph, vocal recordings) a complete written description can serve as verification for the biological record. Please be as thorough as your field notes allow. Do not feel constrained by the space provided. Additional supporting descriptions/illustrations may be attached. Note that photographs or recordings WILL NOT BE RETURNED but become part of the permanent record for the observation.

Structure: (Overall size and shape plus details on the head, feet, tail, etc.)

A photograph is attached, but the birds were both clearly sparrows based on overall size, shape and coloration.

Plumage: (e.g. markings, coloration, molt)

The birds exhibited an orange eyebrow stripe and orangey/buffy breast. There was also a white median crown stripe, and the purplish nape streaks that separates this species from the Nelson's and Saltmarsh Sparrows can be seen in the photo taken by Rennie Talbert.

Description of any vocalizations, if heard:

None

Description of behavior:

Several sparrows were feeding in a weedy patch beside the paved walkway along the larger Goose Pond. When we saw them fly up to weed stalks as we approached, we recognized one of the sparrows as either a Nelson's or LeConte's Sparrow. The sparrow would drop into the weeds to feed, but eventually came up to pishing and watched us. We got great looks and identification was pretty easy. Initially only one LeConte's Sparrow was seen, but soon a second bird came up at the same as the first LeConte's and was spotted first by Mike Griffith. The two LeConte's Sparrows continued to feed in the weedy field but came up to perch on weed stalks from time to time where they could be observed at fairly close range. They were still feeding in the same area when we left.

Habitat: (General and Specific)

The habitat where the birds were found was a weedy field adjacent to the "Goose Ponds" at the Robert C. Byrd Locks & Dam. This general area has produced several Nelson Sparrow sightings over the years and a previous LeConte's Sparrow record (1/12/13) by Mike Griffith and David Patick. Interestingly, Mike noted that the bird in the 2013 sighting was across the path and about 10ft away from the current sighting.

Circumstances of observation: (Include details of distance to bird, optics employed, lighting in relation to observer and the bird)

Mike Griffith and I were walking along the paved path at the south end of the larger of the two Goose Ponds. Several sparrows flew up from the ground into the weeds about 15-20 ft. in front of us along the edge of the path as we approached. The sun was fairly high and was lighting the birds from primarily behind us. We started observing the sparrows in an attempt to identify them and quickly recognized one of the sparrows as either a Nelson's or LeConte's Sparrow because of the facial and breast coloration. We were then able to see the purplish nape streaking and white median crown stripe, which indicated LeConte's Sparrow. As we continued to observe the sparrow, a second LeConte's came up and joined the first bird. They would stay up on weedy stalks for two or three minutes before dropping back into the weeds and out of sight. Then they would pop back up about two feet above the ground onto the weed stalks again where they could be observed. While we were watching the two LeConte's Sparrows, Rennie and Amy Talbert came up and Rennie was able to take the attached close up photo. I was using my Swarovski SLC 10x42 binoculars.

Previous experience with this species:

I have seen this species in both Texas (a couple of times) and Virginia (once). Mike Griffith has also seen this species on several occasions and has the 3rd record of LeConte's Sparrow in West Virginia. This was a life species for the Talberts.

Experiences with similarly appearing species which are eliminated by your description: (Please be specific)

The main bird that might be confused with this species is Nelson's Sparrow. However, Nelson's Sparrow lacks the purplish nape streaking and white median crown stripe. Likewise, Saltmarsh Sparrow lacks the purplish nape streaking and median crown stripe. The only other sparrow that might be close to this sparrow is Grasshopper Sparrow with a median crown stripe and buffy breast. However, the habitat was not appropriate for Grasshopper Sparrow, the bird's head was not flat as seen with Grasshopper Sparrow and the Grasshopper Sparrow lacks the orange eyebrow seen with the birds we observed. Mike and I have seen all of these birds previously.

Other observers: (Names, Addresses, E-mail please)

If the others agree with your identification they can sign this form here. If they care to provide additional details they can submit their own report.

Mike Griffith, [REDACTED]
Rennie and Amy Talbert, [REDACTED]

Additional observer signature: [REDACTED]

Additional observer signature: [REDACTED]

Additional observer signature: [REDACTED]

Books, illustrations and advice consulted, and especially how did these influence this description:

National Geographic Field Guide to the Birds of North America

How long after observing this bird did you first write this description?

4 months

Name:

Gary O. Rankin

Address:

Date:

Signature:

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