

Rodent Killing by Common Grackle: On January 14, 1971, as we watched our feeding area from the kitchen window, we were surprised to see a Common Grackle attack and apparently kill a small rodent under a large blue spruce in the yard. The grackle grabbed the rodent by the neck and slammed it against the ground several times, then pecked at it. The bird then disappeared from view under and behind the tree. Upon investigating shortly afterward, we could find no remains, and since there had been no cats or dogs in the yard, we assume the grackle took its prey with it as it flew off. This rodent appeared to be the size of a large mouse, brown, with a short tail, probably a meadow mouse. We had seen it on other occasions around the cracked corn which had spilled from one of the feeders. (We haven't seen it since, I might add!) This is the first such behavior we have ever witnessed in the Common Grackle. It would be interesting to know whether or not the bird actually consumed the rodent.

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Sharp-tailed Sparrow Lays Dwarf Eggs: Abnormal wild bird eggs are rarely reported. For the domestic hen, Romanoff and Romanoff (*The Avian Egg*, 258, 1949) found five dwarf eggs per 10,000 laid, and they considered the dwarf egg to be the most common abnormal egg except for that with two yolks.

On 19 June 1970 at Tobay, Jones Beach, New York, I found a Sharp-tailed Sparrow (*Ammodramus caudacuta*) nest with two abnormally small eggs. They measure 12.4 mm $\times$ 10.6 mm and 15.2 mm $\times$ 12.6 mm. Hill (*in* Bent, U.S. Natl. Mus. Bull., 237:801, 1968) gives the average dimensions of 105 Sharp-tailed Sparrow eggs as 19.4 mm $\times$ 14.6 mm, with two eggs having the smallest dimensions measuring 17.8 mm $\times$ 15.2 mm and 20.8 mm $\times$ 13.2 mm.

Clutches with two dwarf eggs are rarer than those with only one: of 200 domestic hens that laid dwarf eggs, 89% laid but one and 11% laid two or more (Romanoff and Romanoff, *op. cit.*, 258).

The shape of the two Sharp-tailed Sparrow eggs is prolate-spheroidal, their shape indices (breadth/length $\times$ 100) being 86 (smaller egg) and 83. A prolate-spheroidal egg has an average shape index of 80, while the other common shape of dwarf eggs, cylindrical, has an average shape index of 53 (Romanoff and Romanoff, *op. cit.*, 259). The color pattern of the eggs is normal.

The nest was located on the ground, under some Spike-Grass (*Distichlis spicata*), and the two eggs, the only ones I could find, had been spilled out of the nest. The larger egg had been punctured and was dried out. The smaller egg contained yolk, but was not examined for an embryo. —

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Clay-colored Sparrow Nesting in Western New York: In recent years, several records suggest the incursion of the Clay-colored Sparrow (*Spizella pallida*) as a breeding species in western New York. One or two individuals had been sighted in Amherst in July 1969¹ and in Irondequoit and Braddocks Bay in May of 1969.² In the summer of 1970, a pair of Clay-colored Sparrows established the first western New York breeding record in a Scotch Pine Christmas tree plantation near Alfred, New York.

The 23-acre Scotch Pine plantation is located at 2300' elevation near Foster Lake, about 2 miles west-southwest of Alfred and is used as a site for a summer Breeding Bird Census.³ During July 1969, the author felt certain of hearing the song of a

¹ *Kingbird*, XIX:215.

² *Kingbird*, XIX:151.

³ For a detailed description of the census area see *Audubon Field Notes*, 23:743.

Clay-colored Sparrow on three different occasions but was never able to find the elusive bird. On May 17, 1970, Clarence Klingensmith made the first positive identification of a male Clay-colored Sparrow in this Scotch Pine plantation. His careful and detailed description of the bird appeared in the *Allegany County Bird Club News* of June 1970.⁴ Several other members of the Allegany County Bird Club observed the bird with its striped crown, brown cheek patch, and unstreaked light gray breast as it remained in the area, perching on Scotch Pine trees and singing its characteristic low-pitched buzzes. Although attempts to photograph the bird were unsuccessful, Lou and Doris Burton were able to record its song on tape.

The male continued to sing throughout May and was carefully studied on June 2, 6, and 8. Activity was confined to an area of about one square acre containing rows of 4-6' Scotch Pine trees interspersed with grasses and an occasional bramble thicket. This area is prime nesting territory for both Chipping and Song Sparrows. During the week of June 10-16, an extensive search in the area failed to turn up either the adult or a nest. However, on June 24 and 25, both the male and female were flushed from the Scotch Pine undergrowth and studied carefully. The adults were extremely agitated by human presence, uttering the alarm notes 'tsit tsit' repeatedly. Both adults were observed with food in their mouths, in most cases small caterpillars, darting into the undergrowth where young birds were heard calling.

It is interesting to note that the dates of possible onset of incubation of these Clay-colored Sparrows (June 10), (as evidenced by the sudden cessation of song by the male), and the date the adults were first observed feeding young out of the nest (June 24) correspond quite favorably with the average dates for incubation given by Fox in his study of seven nesting pairs of Clay-colored Sparrows in Saskatchewan, Canada, in 1959.⁵

Throughout July and early August, a thorough search of the area failed to produce any evidence of a second nesting; neither the adults nor the young were observed after June 25.

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Ed. Note: Attention is called also to the article "Possible Hybridization between a Clay-colored Sparrow and a Chipping Sparrow at Ithaca" *Kingbird* XI (1):7-11 by Mrs. Malcolm McIlroy.

⁴ *Allegany County Bird Club News*, IV (6):3.

⁵ Fox, Glen A. "A Contribution to the Life History of the Clay-colored Sparrow." *Auk*, 78:221-224.