

NOTES AND OBSERVATIONS

A Central Breast Spot in the Savannah Sparrow: My many hours in the field participating in the New York State Atlas Project have convinced me of the regularity of which a central breast spot occurs on the Savannah Sparrow (*Paserculus sandwichensis*). The breast streaking seems to coalesce into a central spot which is less pronounced than that of the Song Sparrow (*Melospiza melodia*) but nevertheless evident. I have conducted field trips in which novice birders seeing a frontal view of a Savannah Sparrow misidentified it as a Song Sparrow. This confusion arises because all of the commonly used field guides fail to mention that not only Song Sparrows but Savannah Sparrows as well may have a central breast spot.

The following were obtained from personal communication with Richard E. Bonney, Laboratory of Ornithology, Cornell University. C. J. Maynard in his *Handbook of the Sparrows and Finches of New England* (Newtonville, 1896) states that "the streaks sometimes form a central spot on the breast," (p. 31). A. C. Bent in *Life Histories of North American Cardinals, Grosbeaks, Buntings, Towhees, Finches, Sparrows, and Allies*, Part II, states that "...the crisp, black or brown streaks sometimes cluster into a breast spot as in the song sparrow," (p. 689). In addition, John K. Terres in the *Audubon Society Encyclopedia of North American Birds* (1980) says "some have small spots, like song sparrows in [the] center of the breast," (p. 348).

Robert Andrie (personal communication) says after inspecting the Buffalo Museum of Science collection of study skins "that the presence, absence, and degree of size and darkness of the Savannah's spot could vary with age, moult, and perhaps subspecies as well." Personal communication with other expert birders (the abovementioned and John M. C. Peterson, Atlas Coordinator, Region 7) all agree that many Savannah Sparrows observed in the field have a noticeable breast spot.

R. Bonney goes on to say, "I have noted that the darkness of the central spot on the Song Sparrow varies with the distance from which the bird is observed, as Song Sparrows held in the hand often appear nearly 'spotless', perhaps this is also true of the Savannah Sparrow."

Perhaps this communication will clarify what I consider to be an omission from the commonly used field guides that results in confusion to the novice birder.

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A central breast spot may sometimes be found in Lincoln's Sparrows (*Melospiza lincolni*), immature Swamp Sparrows (*M. georgiana*), and immature White-throated Sparrows (*Zonotrichia albicollis*). —Eds.