



LeConte's Sparrow in Town of New Haven, Oswego Co.,  
New York, 7 May 1992. Photograph by Mary Alice Koeneke.

## PHOTOGRAPHS OF NEW YORK STATE RARITIES 55: LECONTE'S SPARROW

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I discovered a LeConte's Sparrow (*Ammodramus leconteii*) on the evening of 7 May 1992 at Nine Mile Point, Town of New Haven, Oswego County. The bird was first observed as it flew up from the edge of Nine Mile Point Road and landed in a thicket of grape vines approximately 5 meters (15 feet) from the observer. From the first glance, the bright orange/ocher coloration on the face and the short, slender, narrow tail were clues that it was not an ordinary sparrow; my immediate thought was of a Sharp-tailed Sparrow, due to the short, narrow shape of the tail. Without a field guide, an exact identification was not possible so I quickly ran for home, the phone, and a field guide. Consulting a field guide made two obvious choices apparent: Sharp-tailed and LeConte's Sparrows (that it was not a Grasshopper Sparrow was immediately apparent due to the shape of the head and the bill; this bird lacked the flat-headed, thick-billed shape and overall dusty coloration of the Grasshopper Sparrow). Several calls were made (including the Syracuse Rare Bird Alert) and within the hour, three other observers arrived to verify the identification. I returned to the location 30 minutes later, this time with camera and field guide. It took only moments to verify the bird's identification as a LeConte's Sparrow. The orange-ocher color on the face and a paler shade of the same color on the breast, the fine streaking along the sides, its gray nape and cheek patches, black-striped crown with a whitish median stripe that became slightly orange near the bill, bluish gray bill, its short pointed, narrow tail were all easily seen. Its appearance is summed up by what Dorothy Crumb had just told me on the phone, "The LeConte's is a pretty little sparrow". The bird was still in place in the thicket, periodically making a soft *chupping* sound as a chip note and occasionally flicking its tail. Several opportunities were taken to photograph the bird when it came into view. At times it moved to the ground under the vines and thicket to feed with a group of White-throated Sparrows and a Song Sparrow. Sue and John Adair, and Gerry Smith arrived and confirmed the identity of this sparrow as a LeConte's. The bird became more elusive and secretive, spending most of its time in the center of the thicket, barely visible, just off the ground, or flying short distances in the shrubbery just off the roadside. The bird stayed in the area (as did the observers) until darkness fell. The following morning,

many birders came to the spot but the bird was not seen again. It was reported singing during the morning by two observers.

The range of LeConte's Sparrow, according to Bull (1974), is chiefly central North America, breeding east locally to southeastern Ontario north of Toronto; rarely to the Saglley River in south central Quebec. It winters mainly in southeastern United States, north along the Atlantic coast to South Carolina.

John Bull (1974, 1976) notes two proven reports, a specimen found dead along Cayuga Lake near Ithaca, 1897 and one mistnetted and banded in Nassau County in 1970, as well as two probably valid reports, Forest Lawn Park, Buffalo, 1971, and Belvidere, Allegany County, 1975. Since then only two reports, both from the Finger Lakes, have been reviewed by the New York State Avian Record Committee (NYSARC), but neither report was accepted. Additional reports of LeConte's Sparrow in *Kingbird* Regional Reports since 1975 — Montauk Point, Region 10, in 1978; Town of Carlton, Region 2, in 1983; and Town of Hanover, Region 1, in 1991 — either were not submitted to or have not yet been reviewed by the NYSARC.

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#### Literature Cited

- Bull, John. 1974. *Birds of New York State*. Doubleday/Natural History Press, Garden City.
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