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## RECENT OBSERVATIONS OF THE FIELD SPARROW IN MANITOBA

by **Martin McNicholl**, 1281 Valour Road, Winnipeg

In the early afternoon of October 3, 1965, when I was carrying out a routine check of the birds in Brookside Cemetery, Winnipeg, I was surprised to hear a bird in song. I could not recall ever having heard the song before, but believed it to be one of the small sparrows. Anxious to identify the author of a bird-song in October, I immediately headed towards the sound. My suspicions of a small sparrow were further strengthened on finding that the song came from an area of the cemetery where native prairie with tall grasses still remains almost untouched except for a fairly large brush pile and a few small trees. This is a favorite spot of migrant sparrows.

On spotting the singer, I at first thought it was a Tree Sparrow (*Spizella arborea*). Suddenly, however, I realized that the bird had a distinctly pink bill. Suspecting a Field Sparrow (*Spizella pusilla*), I noted the following features through 8 x 42 binoculars: "pink bill, clear greyish breast with no breast spot, whitish wing bars, greyish-brown nape, reddish in wings and upper regions (and cap), and whitish throat." The lack of a breast spot was not entirely convincing, as I have seen Tree Sparrows in the fall without this very characteristic feature.

Moreover, I could not be positive that the bird had a white eye-ring, although I thought it did. Suddenly, however, the bird moved closer to me, enabling me to make out the eye-ring clearly. I was then convinced that I was watching a Field Sparrow. My conclusion was verified later in the afternoon by Mr. Vere Scott.

This observation again opened the question of the status of the Field Sparrow in Manitoba. E. E. Thompson (= Ernest Thompson Seton) never recorded it personally, but in his *Birds of Manitoba* (1890) he recorded the following statements: "Very rare summer resident. Red River Settlement: Breeding (D. Gunn) Winnipeg: Summer resident; tolerably common (Hine). Have seen it west of Winnipeg (R. H. Hunter). Qu'Appelle: common summer resident; breeds; arrives April 15 (Guernsey)."

The above observations were believed by John Macoun (Macoun and Macoun, 1909) to be mostly, if not completely, in error; Macoun was convinced that these observers were probably referring to the Clay-colored Sparrow (*Spizella pallida*), which, although abundant in southern Manitoba, was not mentioned by Guernsey, Hunter or Hine.

The Field Sparrow was not definitely recorded in Manitoba until

June 30, 1960, when Harold V. Hosford found a nest in Charleswood (at Winnipeg). The nest contained one Field Sparrow egg and one egg of the Brown-headed Cowbird (*Molothrus ater*). The cowbird egg hatched on July 6, and the nestling was fed until July 15. The Field Sparrow egg did not hatch. It was collected by Richard W. Sutton on July 14, and was found to contain a dessicated embryo about six days old. The Field Sparrow was definitely identified by Hosford on July 3, and was confirmed by Angus H. Shortt on July 6, and Sutton on July 14 (Hosford, 1962; Mossop, 1960).

Although no details seem to be available of an observation of a Field Sparrow at Wawanesa on May 14, 1961, by Ed Robinson, his long-standing reputation leaves little doubt as to the validity of this record (Mossop, 1961).

On September 20, 1964, Roy Simmons was surprised to discover a Field Sparrow in his banding traps in St. Vital (at Winnipeg). This startling find was verified by Angus Shortt. To add to the excitement, a second Field Sparrow entered his traps on the same day. A third Field Sparrow was trapped by Simmons on September 29, 1965 (Hosford, 1964 and 1965) about a week or two before we observed the bird in Brookside Cemetery.

This sudden series of observations in the first half of this decade raises a number of questions. Has this species always occurred in Manitoba and simply been overlooked? This seems unlikely unless it has been here in very small numbers. Possibly the species has fluctuated in numbers over the years. If some of the early records are valid, then perhaps this species was more common in Manitoba before the turn of the century. Thinking that perhaps observers in Minnesota and North Dakota might have recorded a northern range extension, I wrote to Robert B. Janssen and Robert E. Stewart for information on this species; both reported an absence of evidence for this situation.

The latest A.O.U. Check-list (1957) gives the nearest breeding record to Manitoba (of the race *Spizella pusilla pusilla*) as Nisswa in central Minnesota, and (of the race *S.p. arevacea*) Charlson and Minnewauken in northern North Dakota.

The only record for Saskatchewan supposedly is of one banded on October 6, 1946 at Burnham (in the extreme southwestern part of the province) by Arthur Ward (1952), but this record is believed to be uncertain (pers. corres., C. S. Huston to R. W. Nero, 1958), and this species is not listed for Saskatchewan. However, as the Field Sparrow breeds in northern Montana and North Dakota, observers in southern Saskatchewan should watch for it.

Both Mr. Hosford and I felt that the birds we saw resembled the Tree Sparrow much more strikingly than the Chipping Sparrow (*S. passerina*); and that the white eye-ring, although very clear at close range, is a more difficult field mark to see than other features, e.g., the pink bill which is readily seen.

I would like to thank Mr. Harold V. Hosford, Mr. Robert B. Janssen, Dr. Robert W. Nero, Mr. Roy Simmons, and Dr. Robert E. Stewart for information they provided for this note.

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# COOPERATIVE SPRING MIGRATION STUDY, 1966

Compiled by <b>MARY HOUSTON</b> 863 University Drive Saskatoon	BLADWORTH P. Lawrence Beckie	DESCHAMBAULT LAKE Rick Sanderson	DILKE J. B. Belcher	DUNDURN Harry Harder	ERINFERRY Mrs. E. A. Dodd	ESK R. F. Klatt	FORT SAN E. M. Callin	INDIAN HEAD Lorne Scott	ISLAND FALLS Gordon H. Dash	KELVINGTON Brian Irving	KINISTINO P. Wojcichowsky	
	Whistling Swan		My15	Ap14	Ap12		Ap23	Ap12	Ap23		Ap25	Ap23
	Canada Goose		Ap20	Mr30	Ap12	Ap 1	Mr18	Mr21	Ap 2	My22	Mr29	Ap10
	Mallard	Ap 6	Ap20	Ap 3	Ap 2	Ap 6	Mr23	Mr30	Mr31	My 5	Ap 1	Ap 2
	Pintail	Mr30	My 4	Mr29	Mr30		Mr29	Mr30	Mr29		Ap 1	Ap 2
	Marsh Hawk	Ap12	Ap21	Mr27	Ap 2		Ap11	Mr21	Mr16		Ap 7	Ap20
	Killdeer	Ap11	My 4	Mr30	Ap18	Ap25	Ap14	Mr30	Ap 2	My21	Ap 4	Ap15
	Common Snipe		My 5					My 5	Ap25		My 4	My19
	Mourning Dove	My 4	My 3	My 3	My 4	Ap27	Ap30	Ap18	My 1		Ap24	My17
	Common Nighthawk	My28	My30	My27		My 6	Jn 6	My24	My31			My15
	Ruby-throated Hummingbird		My26					My22				My27
	Yellow-shafted Flicker	Ap21	My 5	Ap22	My 1	My27	Ap24	Ap22	Ap23	My12	Ap25	My 3
	Eastern Kingbird	My22	My23	My22	My28	My28	My26	My11	My16		My21	My24
	Great-crested Flycatcher											
	Eastern Phoebe		May12			Ap24		My14	My29	My11	Ap30	My 2

Barn Swallow	My 5	My26	My 5	My 6	My 7	My 7	My 6	My21	My 7	My24
Purple Martin					Jn 11	My22	Jn 8			My26
Common Crow	Mr 15	Mr 27	Mr 16	Mr 26	Mr 11	Mr 11	Mr 13	Ap 9	Mr 20	Mr 25
House Wren	My21				My27	My21	My23		My26	My26
Catbird	My31				My28	My26	Jn 3		My27	My26
Brown Thrasher	My22		My16		My18	My15	Jn 2			
Red-eyed Vireo		Jn 4				My31	My20	Jn 3		My 2
Black-and-white Warbler		My13				My12	My19			
Tennessee Warbler		Jn 2				My22		Jn 3		
Yellow Warbler	My25	My19		My28		My10	My15	My29	My13	My24
Myrtle Warbler		My 2	My19	Ap27		Ap26	My 9	My14	Ap30	My14
Blackpoll Warbler		My28				My22				
Ovenbird		My28				My31				
American Redstart		My28				My22				Jn 3
Bobolink					Jn 18		Jn 10			
Redwinged Blackbird	Ap 4	My 4	Ap15	My 2	My 1	Ap 4	Ap 2	My14	Ap21	Ap25
Baltimore Oriole	My24		My22		My27	My22	My23		My21	My24
Rose-breasted Grosbeak		May23		My15		My20	My29			My25
American Goldfinch	My28	Jn 4	My24		My30	My21	My23		My31	Jn 3
Slate-colored Junco	Mr30	Ap14	Ap 2	Ap 7	My16	Mr18	Ap 2	Ap17	Ap 3	Ap24
Chipping Sparrow	My 5	My12	My 8	My 6		My 4	My 4	My15	My21	My 5
White-crowned Sparrow	My 3		My 8	My 6		My 1	My 4	My15	My 5	My14
White-throated Sparrow	My 5	My11	My 8	My 6		My 3	My10	My21	My 7	My10

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		LUCKY LAKE Mrs. E. C. Boon		MOOSE JAW M.J. Nat. Hist. Soc.	NIPAWIN M. G. Street	REGINA R.N.H.S.	SASKATOON J. B. Gollop & N.H.S.	SHEHO William Niven	SKULL CREEK S. A. Mann	SPIRIT LAKE Wm. Anaka	YELLOW CREEK Bohdan Pylypec	YELLOW CREEK Derwent Mazur	YELLOW GRASS Mrs. R. Peterson
Whistling Swan	Ap 5				Ap 24	Ap 2	Ap 13	Ap 22	Ap 4	Ap 23		Ap 18	Ap 8
Canada Goose	Mr 29	Mr 15	Mr 15	Mr 15	Ap 3	Ap 2	Mr 31	Mr 24	Mr 14	Mr 16	Ap 1	Mr 27	Ap 2
Mallard	Mr 28	Mr 15	Mr 15	Mr 15	Ap 11	Mr 27	Mr 30	Ap 2	Mr 21	Ap 8	Ap 5	Ap 3	Ap 2
Pintail	Mr 28	Mr 15	Mr 15	Mr 15	Ap 11	Mr 25	Mr 19	Ap 4	Mr 26	Ap 7	Ap 2	Ap 3	Ap 2
Marsh Hawk		Mr 20	Mr 20	Mr 20	Ap 20	Mr 24	Mr 15	Mr 24	Mr 21	Ap 2	Mr 31	Ap 2	Ap 21
Killdeer	Ap 4				Ap 23	Ap 9	Mr 28	Ap 14	Mr 24	Ap 9	Ap 15	Ap 2	Ap 24
Common Snipe						My 1	Ap 23	My 2	Ap 24	Ap 23	Ap 23	My 4	
Mourning Dove		My 1	My 1	My 1		Ap 18	Ap 23	Ap 20	Ap 25	Ap 24	My 6	My 4	Ap 23
Common Nighthawk					Jn 3	My 29	My 31	Jn 4		Jn 7	Jn 6	Jn 4	
Ruby-throated Hummingbird					My 29			Jn 10		Jn 3	My 27	Jn 2	
Yellow-shafted Flicker					Ap 24	Ap 21	Ap 21	Ap 16	Ap 24	Ap 23	Ap 24	Ap 23	My 8
Eastern Kingbird	Jn 4				My 29	My 21	My 14	My 23	My 15	My 29	My 22	My 25	My 25
Great-crested Flycatcher										My 28			My 21
Eastern Phoebe					My 8	My 2	My 4	My 6		Ap 24	My 1	My 29	Jn 5

Barn Swallow	My 6		My 8	My 6	My 7	My 5	My 11	My 5	My 9	My 10	My 21
Purple Martin				My 7	My 14	My 8			My 13	My 22	
Common Crow	Mr 17	Mr 17	Mr 18	Mr 16	Mr 15	Mr 15	Mr 17	Mr 16	Mr 25	Mr 15	Mr 31
House Wren		My 30	My 16	My 7	My 10	My 21	My 14	My 20	My 21	My 6	My 23
Catbird			My 22	My 18	My 3	My 21	My 31	My 24	Jn 9	My 31	My 30
Brown Thrasher	My 31			My 10	My 11	My 17	My 17			My 25	My 20
Red-eyed Vireo			Jn 1	My 28	My 14	My 26	My 26	My 31	Jn 2		
Black-and-white Warbler		My 7	My 23	My 7	My 7				My 21		
Tennessee Warbler			My 23	My 7	My 21	My 22		My 22	My 25		
Yellow Warbler		My 8	My 21	My 4	My 7	My 21	My 20	My 22	My 16	My 26	My 7
Myrtle Warbler		My 4	My 5	Ap 8	Ap 26	My 7		Ap 24	My 6	My 7	Ap 30
Blackpoll Warbler		My 21	My 23	My 11	My 14	My 23			My 23		Jn 5
Ovenbird				Ap 29	My 28		My 30	My 28			
American Redstart			My 23	My 15	My 31				My 29		
Bobolink				My 15	My 22	My 21	Jn 20				
Redwinged Blackbird	Ap 3		Ap 28	Ap 5	Ap 9	Ap 10	Mr 29	Ap 9	Ap 22	Mr 30	Ap 25
Baltimore Oriole	My 31		My 23	My 12	My 14	My 21	My 8	My 24	My 25	My 26	Jn 1
Rose-breasted Grosbeak			My 25	My 15	My 14	Jn 1		My 17	My 21	My 31	
American Goldfinch	My 31	My 27	Jn 3	My 22	My 26	My 26	My 25	My 27	My 29	My 31	My 27
Slate-colored Junco	Ap 16	Ap 3	Ap 15	Mr 20	Mr 26	Mr 30	Mr 24	Mr 29	Mr 27	Ap 2	Ap 15
Chipping Sparrow		My 8	My 5	My 3	My 7	My 16	Ap 24	My 10	My 10	My 22	My 23
White-crowned Sparrow	My 3	My 4	My 7	My 1	My 2	My 5	Ap 26	My 13	My 11		
White-throated Sparrow		My 7	My 12	Ap 26	My 4	My 5	My 8	My 5	My 5		