

the nest. Thus the young burst their sheaths and left the nest on their eighth and ninth days after hatching, and the period from onset of incubation to departure from the nest lasted 18 days for the older of the two, 17 days for the younger.

I attribute the delayed emergence of feathers from sheaths and the slightly extended nestling period to the unseasonably cool weather from 9 through 14 June. High and low temperatures, in degrees Fahrenheit, for 8 through 15 June (U.S. Dept. Comm. 1980) were: 8 June 90/77, 9 June 90/53, 10 June 78/57, 11 June 86/60, 12 June 76/54, 13 June 82/42, 14 June 77/51, and 15 June 84/72. At 0900 EDT on 14 June my outdoor thermometer registered 65° F, and the nestlings were not being brooded. Although the parents seemed to have no problem finding an adequate supply of prey items, the growth and development of the young birds appeared to slow down once the daytime brooding was reduced or halted. The quill-covered young birds mostly remained huddled together in the nest cup between feedings and were generally much less active than the young in the 1973 nest. This behavior apparently enabled the nestlings to conserve energy and maintain body temperature without benefit of daytime brooding during several days of unseasonably cool weather.

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### Winter Records of the Grasshopper Sparrow In the North Carolina Sandhills

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The winter status of the Grasshopper Sparrow (*Ammodramus savannarum*) in North Carolina is not clearly understood. It apparently winters irregularly in the piedmont and coastal plain. Preferred winter habitats are weedy old fields, pastures, broomsedge fields, and similar habitats. Most published winter records for North Carolina are from the last half of December. However, this species is difficult to locate during the nonbreeding season. It does not flock with other birds, and when flushed, flies only a short distance before landing and running. Such "runner" sparrows are notoriously difficult to observe. Thus, the Grasshopper Sparrow may be more common in winter than realized.

Prior to 1978, only one record for this species existed for the Sandhills region in south-central North Carolina. M.P. Skinner saw one on 1 March 1926, but commented that "it may winter in the Sandhills" (Skinner and Achorn 1928, A Guide to the Winter Birds of the North Carolina Sandhills, Science Press, Lancaster, Pa.). This record probably represents a wintering individual, but it could be an early spring migrant.

On 12 November 1978, a Grasshopper Sparrow was seen in the Sandhills Game Lands, about 5.8 miles NW of Hoffman, Richmond County, N.C. Observers were

Roberta Blue, Dick Repasky, Tim Stamps, and Jay Carter. The sparrow was flushed five times from a small field in Longleaf Pine (*Pinus palustris*)—Turkey Oak (*Quercus laevis*) woods. It then perched in a small oak and was positively identified by all observers. The field has vegetated with broomsedge (*Andropogon* sp.) and dead weeds.

On 7 February 1979, a Grasshopper Sparrow appeared in the yard of Marion Jones in Pinehurst, Moore County, N.C. It was seen there irregularly through 17 March. Recognizable photographs were taken by Tom Howard. This bird was in very atypical habitat. The yard was forested with pines, and evergreen shrubbery was around the house and patio. Some old fields with broomsedge were a few hundred yards away, but appeared too sparsely vegetated to be good habitat. The sparrow was first noticed during a snow and ice storm on 7 February. It fed with other ground-feeding species on a concrete patio where birdseed had been scattered. Later it came when the feeding area was less crowded, and was often alone. Although it preferred to feed on the floor of the patio, it also took seed spread on a patio bench that sat next to the house. The bird normally appeared first under the bench and gradually moved to seeds on the concrete, seldom going more than 5 or 10 feet from the bench and evergreen shrubbery. Sometimes, especially if the sun was out, it hopped up on the bench and sat quietly for a few minutes. It was seen in a tree only once, and never on nearby pole feeders.

Although the Grasshopper Sparrow seen in November 1978 may have been a late migrant, the one in February 1979 was undoubtedly a winter storm refugee. It is noteworthy that the latter bird lingered in atypical habitat after the severe weather passed. The Grasshopper Sparrow may winter in the Sandhills more commonly than the three records indicate, but until there are more published records, it must be considered very rare in the winter months.

## BACKYARD BIRDING

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nuthatches) from tree to tree until they are well out of the range considered by the titmice as their own property and hunting grounds.

The most interesting reaction to strangers from the sky, however, is the way the titmice respond to hawks. Two kinds of hawks may turn up in our area, mostly in fall and winter. The large hawks, buteos, such as the Red-tailed, pose little threat to the bird life. Except for Blue Jays and crows, their passage goes virtually unnoticed by the small birds. But that other kind of hawk, the accipiter, such as a Sharp-shinned or Cooper's, which prey on birds, causes panic and instant silence. Now how these little birds know the difference in the hawks, even when it may be very high in the sky, beats me. But they do know! I have learned to look for a sharpie when all of a sudden a titmouse lets out with the highest, thinnest shriek it can make. Everything lets out with a cry of alarm and dives for the nearest cover. In a second or two following the alarm and great disappearing act, sure enough, here comes the little hawk flying over. Sometimes it is high; sometimes at tree-top level. It flies so fast and sure, even through the trees, that one cannot help but admire it. The grace and agility of the hawk, however, is unappreciated by the little birds who fear it so. Should a bird find itself unable to reach good cover, it simply "freezes" to the twig on which it is perched.

Once I was standing under a dogwood tree, tossing nuts to my titmouse friends when the Sharp-shinned Hawk flew over, landed in the top of a nearby sweetgum tree and proceeded to scan the area for his dinner. The alarm had been given by the titmouse I was feeding at the moment. He was afraid to move from his perch over my head. I watched him as he sat so still; not a feather ruffled, not a muscle moved. His eyes were