

## LITERATURE CITED

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### Status of the Le Conte's Sparrow in the Carolinas

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On 4 December 1982, I flushed a small sparrow on several occasions from a moist grassy field on the edge of Beaverdam Reservoir in northern Wake County, N.C. I tentatively identified the bird as a Le Conte's Sparrow (*Ammodramus leconteii*) because of its sharp tail, rather low and feeble flight, and overall slimness. It was no larger than the many Savannah Sparrows (*Passerculus sandwichensis*) in the same field. As the bird never perched in sight, and as its flight was always directly away from me, I was unable to obtain any other field marks.

Allen Bryan and I flushed the sparrow in question in the same area on 17 December. It immediately flew to a shrub in a nearby hedgerow and remained in sight there and on several other perches for about 5 minutes. It was, indeed, a Le Conte's Sparrow. The streaks along the side of the breast and belly, thin purplish nape streaks, whitish median stripe through the crown, orange stripe over the eye, absence of a malar stripe, and especially the soft peach-orange color of the underparts and face were clearly seen. Because the streaks on the underparts extended onto the upper breast, nearly meeting along the midline, I suspect that the bird was an immature. The Le Conte's was seen again on 18 December by Derb Center and Wayne and Fran Irvin, in addition to Bryan and me.

This appears to be the third winter record for this species in North Carolina, but the first away from the coast (Fig. 1). The other winter records are two at Bodie Island from 30 December 1974 to 10 January 1975 (Chat 39:10, 42:60) and one near Carolina Beach on 25 January 1981 (Chat 45:83). In South Carolina, there are numerous winter records for the Savannah River Plant, the Charleston area, and the McClellanville area. Other isolated winter records in the latter state are at Chester (South Carolina Bird Life, 1970, p. 529), near Pendleton (Chat 45:83), at Santee National Wildlife Refuge (Chat 39:63), and in the Litchfield Beach - Pawleys Island area (Chat 39:10, 45:83). Le Conte's Sparrow possibly winters regularly north to Santee refuge and Carolina Beach; it certainly is regular (though rare or uncommon) north to the Savannah River Plant and the Santee River delta (see Fig. 1).

I have also shown the published spring and fall records (Fig. 1) for localities outside the regular winter range. The few spring records show no distinct geographical pattern. However, in the fall, the species seems somewhat more likely to occur near the coast than inland.

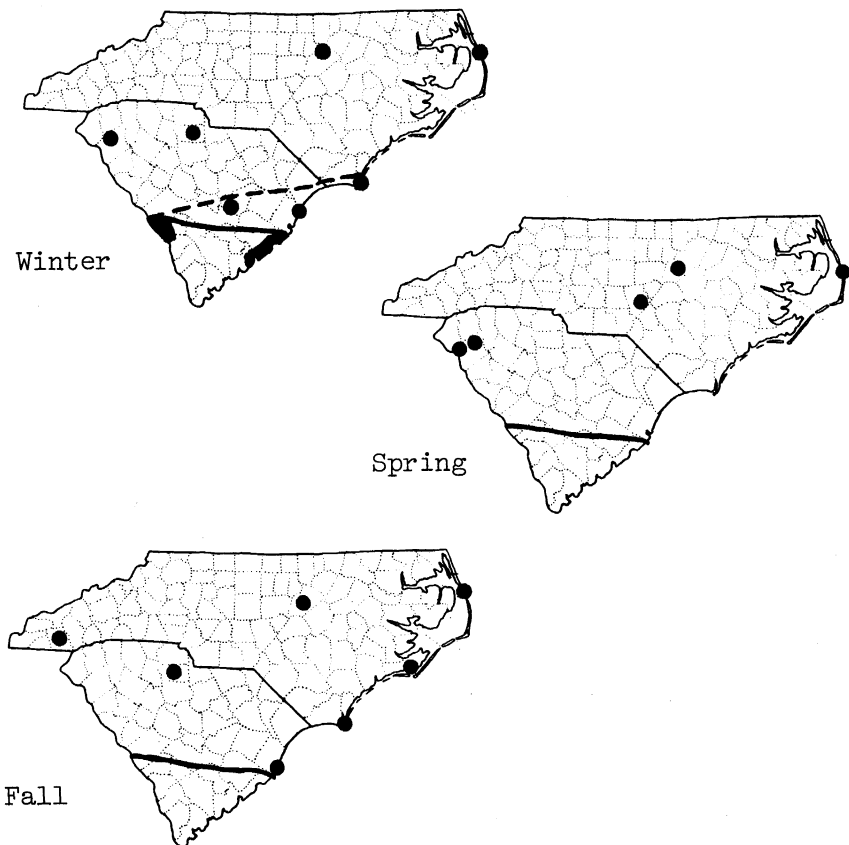


Fig. 1. Distribution of the Le Conte's Sparrow in the Carolinas. Dots indicate isolated records; solid areas indicate numerous records. Solid line is the probable northern edge of the regular winter range; dotted line is the possible northern limit of regular occurrence.

North Carolina records span the period from 17 October to 25 January, in addition to 2 April, 21 April, and 30 April. Dates in South Carolina range from 25 October to 27 April.

Le Conte's is an open country sparrow, occurring in various types of herbaceous cover. Although most authors indicate that it occurs most often in winter in broomsedge (*Andropogon*) fields, individuals that I saw near Pendleton, S.C., and Beaverdam Reservoir, N.C., were found in grassy fields (with little broomsedge) in damp ground. The vegetation in these fields averaged 0.5 m in height. This species also occurs in the drier portions of marshes (ranging from fresh to salt) and in rice fields. Thus, in general, Le Conte's should be looked for in fairly thick grassy cover of knee height, often where vegetation is somewhat matted, and preferably where slightly damp.

This is a very secretive species that seldom utters even a call note in winter. Frequently, a special search must be made to find Le Conte's Sparrows, as they tend to be scarce in

hedgerows and in weedy, forb-covered fields inhabited by most sparrows. Unless shrubs or saplings are present in the habitat (in which the sparrows may perch), it can be very difficult to obtain field marks on the birds as they flush and then drop back into thick herbaceous cover. Thus, Le Conte's Sparrow is undoubtedly more numerous in the Carolinas than the meager number of reports suggest.

## BRIEFS FOR THE FILES

HARRY E. LeGRAND JR.

(All dates 1982 unless otherwise indicated)

**COMMON LOON:** An outstanding inland count was 280 to 300 seen at Jordan Reservoir, in eastern Chatham County, N.C., by Bill and Margaret Wagner and Johnnie Payne on 29 November. Zach Bynum saw 40 on Salem Lake at Winston-Salem, N.C., on 13 and 14 November.

**RED-THROATED LOON:** Very rare inland was one noted by Ricky Davis with a flock of Common Loons at Jordan Reservoir on 26 November.

**HORNED GREBE:** Bill and Margaret Wagner observed a migratory flock of 35 grebes on 29 November at Jordan Reservoir.

**GREATER SHEARWATER:** This shearwater has been rather difficult to find on pelagic trips in the past few years. Three Greaters were seen by Dave Sibley, Robert Ake, and Paul DuMont off Hatteras, N.C., on 9 October; this trip was the only one of five scheduled this fall by Ake and DuMont that departed from shore. Other shearwaters on this trip were 56 Cory's and 45 Audubon's.

**AUDUBON'S SHEARWATER:** Dan Kaplan and Norm Budnitz saw one from shore at Coquina Beach on Bodie Island, N.C., on 15 August.

**BLACK-CAPPED PETREL:** Approximately 50 were observed off Cape Hatteras, N.C., on the Ake-DuMont pelagic trip on 9 October.

**AMERICAN WHITE PELICAN:** Derb Carter observed one flying N over the Umstead Bridge at Croatan Sound, N.C., on 3 November.

**DOUBLE-CRESTED CORMORANT:** Five birds were late at Jordan Reservoir on 3 December (Don Wright), whereas one was noteworthy on 7 November at Burlington, N.C. (Allen Bryan).

**ANHINGA:** Two were seen near Fayetteville, N.C., by Philip Crutchfield as late as 28 September.

**GREAT BLUE HERON:** A good inland count was 80 birds noted on 26 September at Jordan Reservoir by Bill Wagner and party.

**CATTLE EGRET:** Philip Crutchfield observed 55 postbreeding egrets at Fayetteville on 7 August, and 18 were still present on 30 September. Two were rare at Beaverdam Reservoir in northern Wake County, N.C., on 7 October (Merrill Lynch), and another was very late on 29 November at Jordan Reservoir (Bill and Margaret Wagner).

**SNOWY EGRET:** At least four were present during August and September at Fayetteville, as noted by Philip Crutchfield, and another was seen at Jordan Reservoir on 6 September by Ross Jervis.