



American Tree Sparrow (*Spizella arborea*) on rail of *Lady Liza* 20 km E of Edisto Island, 26 April 1985. (Photo by Pete Laurie)

Occurrence of American Tree Sparrow off the South Carolina Coast

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On 26 April 1985 at about 1300 EDT, a sparrow flew aboard the South Carolina Wildlife and Marine Resources Department's research vessel *Lady Liza*. The vessel was 20 km S of Charleston Harbor buoys C3 and C4, and about 20 km E of Edisto Island. At first glance the bird appeared to be an American Tree Sparrow (*Spizella arborea*). Having grown up in northeastern Pennsylvania where in winter tree sparrows frequent feeders, I am quite familiar with the bird. For the next 2 hours, with a copy of Peterson's *Field Guide to the Birds of Eastern and Central North America* (1980) in hand, I watched the bird from distances of less than a meter as it hopped about the deck. I never before had the opportunity to study a bird from every possible angle at close range for such a length of time.

The rusty cap, white wing bars, and dark spot on the clear breast were distinctive. The throat was the same pale gray as the upper breast. A two-tone bill, dark above and yellow below, was very obvious. The bird was long and slim, quite different from the dark,

stocky Swamp Sparrows I see regularly. Throughout the winter and early spring I had watched both Field Sparrows and Chipping Sparrows at close range at my feeder. This bird obviously was larger, with a well-defined chestnut eye line and a longer tail. I concluded the bird was indeed an American Tree Sparrow.

At 1506, as the vessel entered Charleston Harbor, the bird flew strongly toward Fort Moultrie on Sullivan's Island.

Sprunt and Chamberlain (1970) list only seven records of the American Tree Sparrow in South Carolina. No specimen has been collected in the state. Since 1970 there are two reports of the tree sparrow in South Carolina: three on 18 December 1976 at Columbia (Chat 41:40), and one on 28 February 1973 at Charleston (Chat 37:54).

[EDITOR'S NOTE: With the acceptance of this photographic record by the South Carolina Avian Records Committee, the American Tree Sparrow has been added to the S.C. state list. Prior to this report the species was on the hypothetical list, as no specimen had been collected or photographed, and fewer than four independent, fully documented reports had been published in a journal.—WP]

Status of the Lincoln's Sparrow in South Carolina

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In eastern North America the Lincoln's Sparrow (*Melospiza lincolni*) breeds from northern Quebec and central Labrador and Newfoundland south to northern New York, northwestern Massachusetts, and southern Vermont (A.O.U. Check-list 1983). Nonetheless, the first South Carolina sight record was not made until 1949 (Chat 26:77). The species remained on the state's hypothetical list until 1961, when the first specimen was collected (Chat 26:45). The absence of confirmed records until 1961 is related to the paucity of field workers in the state, as well as to the species' secretive behavior. A similar situation exists for Georgia, where between 1900 and 1953, only 25 birds were reported (Georgia Birds, T.D. Burleigh, 1958).

Changes in the methods and intensity of field ornithology, rather than changes in the species' distribution, lead us to re-evaluate the status of the Lincoln's Sparrow in South Carolina. Many more workers are now afield and are using bird feeders, mist nets, and better optical equipment to observe birds close at hand. During the nonbreeding period Lincoln's Sparrows seem to prefer damp thickets and brush piles (Georgia Birds, T.D. Burleigh, 1958), where their stealthy movements attract little attention. In some cases this species may be misidentified as a Song Sparrow (*Melospiza melodia*), a congener to which it bears a superficial resemblance.

The occurrence of the Lincoln's Sparrow throughout South Carolina is now validated by nine specimens (Table 1). We have analyzed these 9 specimen records, 5 bandings, and 47 sight records for seasonal and regional distribution (Fig. 1).

Lincoln's Sparrows are most numerous during fall migration (October-November). During fall migration it is possible that more individuals occur along the immediate coast