

First Record of Golden-crowned Sparrow (*Zonotrichia atricapilla*) in North Carolina

Steve Shultz

2404 Bristers Spring Way
Apex, NC 27523

On the evening of 22 December 2018, Steve Ritt located a Golden-crowned Sparrow (*Zonotrichia atricapilla*) while sorting through a group of White-throated Sparrows (*Zonotrichia albicollis*) occupying a hedgerow between a gasoline station and Holly Ridge Golf Course at the intersection of Caratoke Highway and Edgewater Drive in Currituck County, NC. The bird was initially seen for a period of about ten minutes in fading light and relocated the next morning by Ritt and several other birders. Ritt states in the initial eBird report: "The first features that caught my attention, differing from the flock of White-throated Sparrows it was with, were the gray cheeks lacking an eyeline and the lack of contrast between the throat and upper breast. I then noticed that there were thin, blackish lateral throat stripes and no apparent malar or "moustachial" stripes. There was a yellowish wash to the front of the crown and lores broken by dark brownish lateral crown stripes. The flanks and general appearance of the bird was lighter and smoother than adjacent White-throated Sparrows, even in the fading evening light. The bill appeared dark".



Golden-crowned Sparrow, 31 Dec 2018, Currituck County, NC. Photo by Greg Hudson.

Ritt notes that the Golden-crowned Sparrow appeared slightly more skittish than the White-throated Sparrows with which it associated. The bird remained in an *Elaeagnus* sp. hedgerow and nearby wet, brushy mixed tree line through at least 14 February 2019.

After discovery, news of the birds' presence quickly spread throughout the birding community, and scores of observers were able to view the sparrow during a period of several weeks. This represents a first record of the species in North Carolina, and with acceptance of photos by the North Carolina Bird Records Committee, Golden-crowned Sparrow was added to the state's Definitive list of accepted species (Swick 2019).

Golden-crowned Sparrow is primarily a species of North America's Pacific coastal

states and provinces, with birds wintering from Baja California North to Washington and

breeding from British Columbia north to Alaska (Sibley 2000). Scattered records exist for birds wandering east from established nesting and wintering areas, with all states and provinces west of the Mississippi River, with the exception of Arkansas, having one or more reports. East of the Mississippi River, there are dozens of reports for states in the Midwest, Northeast and the Canadian Maritimes. The Southeast and Deep South have fewer reports, with one report each for Florida, South Carolina, Tennessee, and Kentucky (eBird 2021). Mississippi, Alabama, Georgia, West Virginia, Virginia, and Delaware have no reports (eBird 2021). The single South Carolina record dates to 22 December 1993, when Perry Nugent reported a bird from the Francis Marion National Forest on the Charleston Christmas Bird Count (Worthington 1995).

It appears that the pattern of vagrancy in the East favors a more northerly component, although the relative lack of sightings may be due to lack of coverage or other factors not related to the actual distribution of the species.



Golden-crowned Sparrow, 17 Jan 2019, Currituck County, NC.

Photo by Pamela Ford.

Literature Cited

eBird <https://ebird.org/map/gocspa> accessed 17 May 2021.

Sibley, D. 2000. *The Sibley Guide to Birds*.

Swick, N. 2019. 2018 Report of the North Carolina Bird Records Committee. *Chat* 83:17-21

Worthington, P.L. 1995. Report of the South Carolina Bird Records Committee 1994. *Chat* 59:89-92