

COLORADO FIELD ORNITHOLOGISTS - SIGHT RECORD FORM

NEW STATE RECORD _____ UNUSUAL RECORD X**Species:** Baird's Sparrow (*Ammodramus bairdii*)**Date:** 30 April 2000 **Number seen:** four **Sex:** ? **Plumage:** presumably Alternate**Locality:** east side of 8 Rd near P Rd **Elevation:** about 5600'**Nearest town:** Kirkwell **County:** Baca**Time observed:** early afternoon**Duration of observation:** each bird for 5-10 seconds; one bird kicked up twice, so ~15 seconds

Description: Heading north from Cottonwood Canyon on a drizzly, fall-out kind of day with Chris Wood, Doug Faulkner, and David Hanni, we saw a field (probably CRP land) on the east side of 8 Rd that looked very good for grassland sparrows, so we got out and gave the field a good stomp. We flushed at least four *Ammodramus* sparrows, all of which were Baird's (BAIS). Though views of each bird were fairly brief, Chris, Doug, and I have all worked in northern Mexico conducting grassland-bird surveys that involved identifying, correctly, birds in exactly this situation.

The BAIS were all fairly identical, at least given the looks we got, so I will describe them as one. Each bird flushed from very close range; we nearly stepped on each one before it flew. The immediate impact upon their flushing was that the bird was an *Ammodramus*, rather than Savannah Sparrow (SAVS; which typically flush much farther from ones feet and often look like stronger fliers than do most *Ammodramus* sparrows). Additionally, the birds were not the small, yellowy things that are obviously LeConte's Sparrow (LCSP). The back was darkish with fairly obvious whitish braces. The tail was fairly short, but not as short or thin as that of Grasshopper Sparrow (GRSP) and also not obviously notched as on SAVS. At this point, the birds are all probably BAIS. Fortunately, at the end of its straight-away escape flight, BAIS has a habit of hooking either right or left (I believe it is done to get a look at where the observer is), flying a few meters, and then dropping into cover. If the flight is short enough and the observer stays on the bird with a binocular, then the observer can see the sides and some of the underparts after the bird hooks. We were able to see all four birds do this and all had white underparts without any strong buffy tones and with strong, distinct black streaks on the sides and chest. On two of the four, I saw the orangish color on the face typical of BAIS. By this, I do not mean to imply that the other two did NOT have the orange facial color, but that I just did not note it.

Similar species eliminated by description: Though the flight ID of *Ammodramus* sparrows can be quite difficult, with practice it is much easier, given, of course, that one gets some kind of look at field marks. The combination of un-notched tail, white underparts, black streaking on sides and chest, and white braces on a dark back eliminate all ID contenders. LCSP is obviously smaller and quite as obviously yellow seen in flight. SAVS has an obviously notched tail and nearly always flushed from a much greater distance than did these birds. Nelson's Sharp-tailed Sparrow (NSTS) shows an obvious orangish rump not present on these birds and look overall much darker than did our birds. All other sparrow species are eliminated on shape, structure, habitat, and/or behavior.

Describe the bird's song and call, if given, including method of delivery (i.e. from perch, in flight, duration): I did not hear these birds.

What is your prior experience with this and similarly-appearing species? I have extensive experience identifying BAIS and other grassland sparrows in flight, as I have spent 2-4 weeks in each of four winters surveying grassland birds in northern Mexico (1996, 1997, 1999, 2000). Therefore, I feel that I can often identify BAIS and GRSP in flight, with SAVS usually being much easier. I have probably seen in excess of 225 Baird's Sparrows (and 100s to 1000s of similar species in northern Mexico, such as Grasshopper and Savannah sparrows) in similar conditions to those of the birds reported here. Additionally, I have seen >25 NSTS in both breeding and wintering areas and have also seen >75 LCSPs in similar conditions.

Light conditions: The sun was completely obscured by a medium overcast that was sporadically spitting drizzle or rain.

Optical equipment used: Zeiss 7x42

Distance, and how estimated: estimated closest distance at ~1 meter

Other observers who saw the bird with you: Chris Wood, Doug Faulkner, David Hanni

Other observers who saw the bird independently: none

If photographed, type of equipment and film: I did not photograph

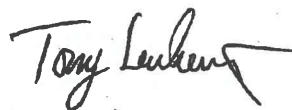
List books, illustrations, recordings, other birders, etc. consulted and how this influenced your identification:

a) at time of observation: none

b) after observation: none

Reporting observer: Tony Leukering

Signature:



Address: Rocky Mountain Bird Observatory, 14500 Lark Bunting Lane, Brighton, CO 80603

Date report was written: 20 May 2000 and 28 December 2002 from extensive notes that I wrote the next day (I only recently refound that field notebook)