

THE SUBSPECIES OF GRASSHOPPER SPARROW  
(*AMMODRAMUS SAVANNARUM*) IN PANAMÁ  
(AVES: EMBERIZINAE)

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*Abstract.*—A specimen of *Ammodramus savannarum pratensis* from Almirante, Bocas del Toro, is the first record for Panamá and the southernmost known for this migrant subspecies. A very pale resident population, *A. s. beatriceae* subsp. nov., restricted to the llanos of Coclé Province, is described. A disjunct population in eastern Panamá Province is referable to *A. s. bimaculatus* of Middle America.

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The Grasshopper Sparrow, *Ammodramus savannarum*, is a secretive, though widely distributed, grassland finch found in most of North America and the Greater Antilles (except Cuba), through Middle America as far as Panamá, with two subspecies isolated in Curaçao and Bonaire and in Colombia and Ecuador. In Panamá, the species is poorly known and there is little in the literature concerning it. Material in the National Museum of Natural History, Smithsonian Institution (USNM), indicates that three distinct subspecies may be found in Panamá, one of which is a migrant and two of which are resident. Of the last two, one represents a very distinct new taxon.

*Ammodramus savannarum pratensis* (Vieillot)

*Fringilla pratensis* Vieillot 1817, Nouv. Dict. Hist. Nat., nouv. ed. 25:24.  
Type-locality, New York.

*Specimens examined.*—PANAMA. BOCAS DEL TORO: Almirante. An unsexed adult taken in November 1963 by personnel of the Gorgas Memorial Laboratory (USNM 533402).

*Remarks.*—This specimen is readily separated from any of the resident populations of *Ammodramus savannarum* in Middle America by its greater wing length (63.4 mm vs. 53.2–59.1 mm for *A. s. bimaculatus*,  $n = 23$ ). It is darker and more richly colored than the birds of western North America (*A. s. perpallidus* [Coues]), but is inseparable from individuals of *A. s. pratensis*, the migratory population breeding in eastern North America. The present specimen marks a significant range extension, the southernmost occurrence of the subspecies heretofore being in Belize (British Honduras). Ridgely (1976:339) mentions a specimen of this species that was captured

and released, also at Almirante, on 4 November 1967. He suggested that this was a migrant, which seems likely in view of the identity of the above specimen and the general lack of sufficient habitat in the Almirante area to sustain a breeding population of this species.

*Ammodramus savannarum bimaculatus* Swainson

*Ammodramus bimaculatus* Swainson 1827, Philos. Mag. (n.s.) 1(6):435.  
Type locality, Temiscaltepec (=Temascaltepec), Mexico.

*Specimens examined*.—PANAMA. CHIRIQUI: Francés (4, AMNH). PANAMA PROVINCE: Río Pacora, 10 miles W of Chepo (2, USNM, one of which is juvenile); 10 miles NW of Chepo (1, USNM).

*Remarks*.—The specimens from the Chepo area have been discussed fully by Aldrich (1945), who assigned them to the subspecies *bimaculatus*, which ranges from Mexico to Chiriquí, Panamá. I concur in this and have little to add to Aldrich's account. The Chepo birds are inseparable from Costa Rican specimens in fresh plumage, though I am not prepared to say that these in turn are the same as Mexican birds, as those Mexican specimens available to me were in quite worn plumage. The birds from Chepo, which is in the eastern extreme of the Pacific slope savannas of Panamá Province, certainly represent a breeding population, as evidenced by the juvenile specimen. Considering their apparent isolation from the nearest known population of *bimaculatus* in Chiriquí, it is somewhat curious that these birds have not differentiated, particularly in light of the distinctiveness of the birds from the savannas of Coclé, described below.

*Ammodramus savannarum beatriceae*, new subspecies

*Holotype*.—USNM 477168, female, taken 10 March 1962 by Alexander Wetmore at El Coco, Coclé Province, Panamá (original number 24894).

*Characters*.—Palest of all the subspecies of *A. savannarum*. Equal in size to *A. s. bimaculatus* but throat, breast, flanks and undertail coverts pale pinkish buff, not rich ochraceous yellow. Dorsum much grayer than in *bimaculatus* and median crown stripe very pale, almost white, instead of deep buff. The subspecies *A. s. caucæ* Chapman, of Colombia and Ecuador, is also separable from *bimaculatus* by its paler coloration, but *beatriceae* is paler still. In a series of seven specimens of *caucæ* from Yumbo, Department of Valle, Colombia (CM), the streaks in the nape are dark, rather blackish brown, never as distinctly reddish as in *beatriceae* or *bimaculatus*. The single available specimen of *A. s. caribæus* (Hartert) from Curaçao (USNM), is also rather pale, but is more ochraceous on the breast and cheeks, more brownish above, and has a decidedly smaller bill than *beatriceae*.

*Range*.—Known only from the savannas of southern Coclé Province, Pacific slope of Panamá.

*Specimens examined (all USNM)*.—PANAMA. COCLE: El Coco (2); 4 miles W of Penonomé (2); Penonomé, Puerto Posada (1); Gago, Gaucho (1); 3 miles NW of Anton (4).

*Etymology*.—Affectionately dedicated to Mrs. Alexander Wetmore, who accompanied her husband on most of his collecting trips to Panamá and who attended him with unselfish devotion through their 25 years of marriage.

*Remarks*.—As this is perhaps the most easily distinguished of all the forms of *Ammodramus savannarum*, it is indicative of a fair degree of isolation of the grassland birds of the llanos of Coclé. Further evidence of this is supplied by another endemic subspecies of Emberizinae, *Sicalis luteola eisenmanni*, described by Wetmore (1953) from most of the same localities as *A. s. beatriceae*. This is the only population of *S. luteola* occurring between Guatemala and Colombia.

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