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W. Ross Silcock

Nebraska Ornithologists' Union, silcock@rosssilcock.com

Mark A. Brogie

Nebraska Ornithologists' Union

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**CASSIN'S SPARROW IN DUNDY AND CHASE COUNTIES,
NEBRASKA**

On 3 and 4 June 1989 Tanya Bray, Doug Rose, and I travelled to Dundy Co. to look for two species: Chihuahuan Raven and Cassin's Sparrow. While we found no Ravens, we did find several Cassin's Sparrows.

All of the Cassin's Sparrows were found in sandy sage prairie habitat. At least six were found, in four different locations. The birds were located most easily by their skylarking behavior, although the song, once heard, is also useful for locating birds. Indeed, Doug Rose found the first Cassin's Sparrow by song. Once located, we were able to study individuals carefully at distances of less than 100 feet. While the plumage is rather nondescript, a grayish-brown overall, notable features are the relatively large size, flattish head, and long tail, the latter with distinctive white tail corners, best seen as the bird spreads its tail on landing.

The first Cassin's Sparrow was found on the south side of a dirt road at a spot one mile north of the Kansas line and four miles east of the Colorado line, in Dundy Co.

There are very few Nebraska records for Cassin's Sparrow (Bray, Padelford, Silcock: *The Birds of Nebraska*, 1986), but it probably occurs more often, as it does not seem to be regularly searched for in its preferred habitat. There is extensive sage prairie in Dundy Co. The breeding range tends to change dramatically in response to climatic conditions however, and it is possible that recent dry conditions have allowed Cassin's Sparrow to expand its breeding range northward in recent years.

Documentations have been sent to the NOU Records Committee.

--- W. Ross Silcock, Box 300, Tabor, Iowa 51653

After hearing of the discovery of Cassin's Sparrow (*Aimophila cassinii*) in southwestern Nebraska Ed M. Brogie also found this species in Chase and Dundy counties on 11 June. He discovered one bird frequenting a brushy sage area on the east side of Enders Reservoir in Chase Co. and found several areas with singing males in Dundy Co. between Benkelman and Haigler. The largest concentrated area of Cassin's Sparrows

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(approximately ten birds making fluttery song flights) he located was approximately five miles west of Benkelman in a sage/yucca habitat on the south side of Highway 34.

Ellen Brogie and I visited this area 21 June and easily located several singing male Cassin's Sparrows. To aid in identification we had in our possession a tape of male Cassin's Sparrow's flutter song flight vocalizations. The calls elicited from the Dundy Co. birds were identical to those on tape; a short whistled note, followed by a trill, another short whistle, and then ending with one more short higher note.



We observed one particular bird which appeared very territorial to an area ad-

acent to the south of Highway 34 and to the west of a private drive. When we played the tape to this bird it responded by making a flutter song flight directly toward us. It then perched on a barb wire fence and gave five or six short rapid "chip" notes before making another flutter song flight.

During these flights the bird achieved a maximum height of around 15 feet and the longest hori-



zontal distance covered was approximately 30 yards. We observed the bird for over an hour under optimal conditions, sometimes at a distance of less than 15 feet. The area was searched unsuccessfully for positive evidence of nesting.

We returned to the area the following morning, erected a mist-net, and within 15 minutes had a Cassin's Sparrow in hand. The bird was banded (#980-96043), photographed, and released. The bird was classified as an adult, based on its worn plumage, partially molted tail, and unstreaked breast, and as a male because the bird "hit the net" during a flutter song flight. (Bent, 1968, Bull. #237, Part 2, pp. 981-990).

The following characteristics were noted:

The bird had a slightly flattened head with a whitish-gray central crown streak, which was bordered with brown. A whitish-gray supercilium above the dark eye was apparent, as was a thin brownish eyeline that ran horizontally from behind the eye to a point perpendicular to the bird's nape. The bill appeared large in relation to head size, and was bicolored; the upper mandible above

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the nostrils was dark, with the remainder flesh-colored.

The unmarked breast and throat of the bird were a uniform whitish-gray coloration. The lesser wing coverts were a chestnut brown and edged with gray. The medial wing coverts were also brown, heavily edged with white, and with black marking running through the midsection, along the feather spine. The secondaries were a lighter brown than that of the coverts and were slightly edged with white, although the posterior parts of the medial feathers of this group were blackish in coloration.

The flanks were slightly streaked and the legs were a pinkish-flesh color. The back of the bird was a mottled gray and brown, with the rump appearing quite barred. The tail was long and rounded and tipped with white. The two medial tail feathers were lighter brown in comparison to the rest of the tail, and were distinctly barred. The captured bird was missing one outer tail feather; the remaining one had a conspicuous whitish outer edge and tip.

Photographs have been sent to the Records Committee.

---Mark A. Brogie, Box 316, Creighton, Neb. 68729