

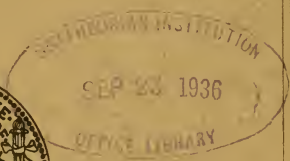
SMITHSONIAN MISCELLANEOUS COLLECTIONS
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A NEW RACE OF THE SONG SPARROW FROM THE APPALACHIAN REGION

BY
ALEXANDER WETMORE
Assistant Secretary, Smithsonian Institution



(PUBLICATION 3399)



CITY OF WASHINGTON
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A NEW RACE OF THE SONG SPARROW FROM THE APPALACHIAN REGION

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For some time the United States National Museum has been accumulating song sparrows to determine the distribution of the races of this bird in the middle section of the eastern United States, with results of considerable interest. In collections made during the past field season by a party financed by the Smithsonian Institution important specimens were obtained in West Virginia that indicate a hitherto unrecognized race. The new form may be known as

MELOSPIZA MELODIA EUPHONIA, n. subsp.

Characters.—Similar to *Melospiza melodia melodia* (Wilson)¹ but distinctly darker above, being grayer, with the dark markings generally more distinct; sides of head grayer, less buffy or brown; tail averaging darker.

Description.—Type, U.S.N.M. no. 348887, ♂ adult, collected in the Cranberry Glades, Pocahontas County, W. Va., at an elevation of 3,300 feet, June 8, 1936, by W. M. Perrygo and C. Lingeback, original no. 393, in somewhat worn breeding dress. Sides of crown chestnut-brown, with the centers of the feathers dull black, and an indistinct line of light grayish olive down the center; superciliary stripe white washed with pale olive-gray; ear-coverts smoke-gray with a slightly buffy tinge, streak behind eye and another below ear-coverts between auburn and chestnut-brown; feathers of back dull russet with heavy black spots at tips, and an indistinct edging of pale olive-gray; rump feathers and upper tail coverts snuff-brown with indistinct blackish spots at tips; tail (considerably worn) fuscous black, edged with snuff-brown, the edging broad at base; lesser and middle wing-coverts dull russet; greater wing-coverts cinnamon-brown on exposed portions, blackish centrally; median and greater coverts with indistinct edgings of pale olive-gray; exposed surface of tertials black, edged with cinnamon-brown; primaries and secondaries fuscous black, the secondaries edged with cinnamon-brown, and the primaries mar-

¹ *Fringilla melodia* Wilson, Amer. Orn., vol. 2, 1810, p. 125, pl. 16, fig. 4.

gined indistinctly with light olive-gray; below white with the throat immaculate; a streak on either side of the throat dull black with an edging above of russet; feathers in center of breast with heavy black apical spots bordered with russet, forming a distinct dark central spot; on either side smaller triangular points of black, bordered more or less with russet, becoming longer, mixed with more brown, on sides and flanks; under tail coverts with centers bister margined with snuff-brown; tibiae cinnamon-brown.

Measurements (of type).—Wing 66.4, tail 66.6, culmen from base 13.2, tarsus 21.6 mm.

Remarks.—For a number of years I have been examining eastern song sparrows with much interest, and for some time it has been evident that the breeding birds of the Alleghany Mountain region constituted a darker race than typical *melodia*. For a time I have followed Todd² in calling this darker race *Melospiza melodia beata* Bangs,³ a name that Todd has applied to the song sparrows of the region west of and including the Appalachian Mountains.

Recently through the assistance of Dr. Thomas Barbour and James L. Peters, of the Museum of Comparative Zoölogy, it has been my privilege to examine the type of *beata* to find that it is not the so-called Mississippi song sparrow but is similar to the birds of the northern plains region. It is identified as *Melospiza m. juddi* Bishop, of which *beata* becomes a synonym. The type agrees with *juddi* in the distinctly light gray cast of the upper surface, with prominent dark markings, though it is slightly darker than a series of that race from the typical area in North Dakota. As one goes farther north, into Canada, specimens that must be called *juddi* become slightly darker, and also among these is often found the large, heavy bill that Bangs noted in describing his type.

It will be recalled that *beata* was based originally on two specimens in the Bryant collection taken at Enterprise, Fla., on April 17, 1859. The southeastward line of migration for many birds of central Canada is now well established, so that the presence of a bird from this area in Florida is not to be considered unusual. The late date also fits in this same picture, for though song sparrows may be nesting in the central United States in April, the breeding grounds of individuals migrant from the northern part of the range of *juddi* may still be closed by winter conditions, so that such birds may linger in the south.

² Auk, 1930, p. 257.

³ *Melospiza melodia beata* Bangs, Proc. New England Zoöl. Club, vol. 6, June 5, 1912, p. 87 (Enterprise, Fla.).

This identification incidentally adds another bird to the list of those known from Florida.

The bird of the mountain area selected as the type locality of *M. m. euphonia* is distinctly darker than specimens from the lowland regions of Tennessee, Kentucky, Indiana, and Illinois. As birds from this area are close to *euphonia*, for the present I identify them as of that race, though it appears that with more material they may be distinguished as distinct. The name *euphonia* will therefore for the present at least replace *beata* as given in the fourth edition of the A. O. U. Check-list of North American Birds (page 357).

The typical series of *euphonia* includes, in addition to a number of skins from the Cranberry Glades, specimens from Cheat Mountain above Cheat Bridge, and Middle Mountain 12 miles northeast of Durbin, in West Virginia. Breeding birds from White Pine, Rocksdale, Philippi, Big Bend, Zela, Drennen, and Muddlety, W. Va., are intermediate toward the lighter, lowland group. The mountain bird extends into Virginia at Pulaski and is the form of White Top Mountain, where with Dr. J. J. Murray I found it in Elk Garden at an elevation of 4,400 feet at the head of Big Helton Creek. Specimens secured by Dr. Murray and me near Sturgills, Jefferson, and Warrentonville, N. C., and Independence, Va., are also this form. Birds from Shawsville and Christiansburg, Va., are intermediate toward *melodia*, as is one from Lexington, Va., and another from Lost River near McCauley, W. Va., but are best identified from the few skins at hand as *euphonia*. A skin from Halltown, W. Va., seems to represent true *melodia*.

To the north I find that breeding specimens from Sayre and Silver Lake, Pa., and Canandaigua Lake, N. Y., are also to be identified as the race *euphonia*.

It may be noted that in common with other races of the song sparrow in the East, *euphonia* shows a distinctly rufescent phase in many individuals. A breeding bird that I collected personally at the type locality in the Cranberry Glades has the brown markings (auburn in color) predominating over any other shade on the dorsal surface.

It has seemed appropriate to me to name this new race *euphonia* from the cheerful song common to all races of the song sparrow throughout its extensive range.