

## NOTES' ON THE FRINGILLIDÆ OF WESTERN ILLINOIS.

BY OTHO C. POLING.

IN PRESENTING a paper on the family Fringillidæ it had been my intention to include only those species of rare occurrence which had come under my observation, but as my notes have increased considerably within the past three seasons I shall, for the sake of completeness, cover the entire family, and consider in particular the rarer Sparrows and Finches. Adams County, where the material for these notes was gathered almost entirely, is situated on the the Mississippi River, west of the centre of the State, the 40th parallel running through its centre. The bottom lands extending north and south through its western portion vary in width from two to six miles, except in the immediate vicinity of Quincy where the bluffs closely approach the river. A large part of these lowlands are free from cultivation, being frequently overflowed. Numerous lakes and sloughs and large tracts of swamp land are interspersed through this territory, and while there are vast tracts of heavy timber, much of it is grown up with reeds and rushes or covered with rank grass and weeds. Willows are everywhere found in abundance, often tracts of many miles being covered by them. Among the bluffs, and to the east, the country is somewhat hilly or undulating, and is drained by numerous large and rapid creeks. Here also is found a great variety of timber. Lima Lake, which will be referred to occasionally, is in the northwest part of the County. It covers a dozen or fifteen square miles, and is usually very shallow.

1. *Coccothraustes vespertina*. EVENING GROSBEAK.—Irregular in its appearance but frequently seen in Illinois. Specimens were observed in the winter of 1887. (See 'Ornithologist and Oölogist', March, 1889.) A small flock of six or seven individuals were seen on April 1, 1889. They were at rest in the top of a soft maple, and had evidently been feeding on the buds during the morning as numbers of them were scattered upon the fresh snow beneath the trees. While at Champaign, Ill., I met with a flock of seven or eight males of this species on Nov. 12, 1889. They were well concealed among the branches of some willows still green with foliage, and I was only attracted by their loud, sharp notes. I secured but



one specimen, a male, and failed to discover the flock again. During a collecting trip in the spring of 1889, Mr. Charles F. Adams secured one fine male of this species near Champaign, Ill., which he found feeding among some sugar maples. The trees were in leaf, and neighboring trees in blossom, and although the exact date was not recorded, it is believed that it was near the first of May, as at that time the Warbler migration was well advanced, and many species were present. From these records it would seem that the Evening Grosbeak is not only a winter straggler, but a spring and fall visitor as well, which may be due to the better condition of its favorite food at such times in more southerly localities.

2. *Carpodacus purpureus*. PURPLE FINCH.—A common winter visitor, appearing late in the fall and remaining until May. Its abundance depends very much on the food supply which is chiefly buttonwood or sycamore balls and the seeds of various weeds. During the winter of 1888-89, the supply of hempseed and sycamore balls was unusual, and in consequence the Purple Finch was one of the most common winter birds. Flocks of many hundreds remained, and their songs could be heard almost any sunny day in winter.

3. *Loxia curvirostra minor*. AMERICAN CROSSBILL.—Very erratic in its visits here. This may be owing to the small amount of pine to be found, but more likely to some other cause, as while here it does not seem to seek the pines so much as some other resorts. I have frequently found them feeding in apple and pear trees where the fruit had remained on and had been frozen. I also noticed one flock feeding on buds of the common cottonwood, and I remained beneath the tree some time watching them while parts of the buds dropped about me.

4. *Loxia leucoptera*. WHITE-WINGED CROSSBILL.—As irregular as the last, and much more rare of late years. Single specimens are sometimes found along with a flock of the red species.

5. *Acanthis linaria*. REDPOLL.—A rare winter visitant. Only seen in February.

6. *Spinus tristis*. AMERICAN GOLDFINCH.—Resident. Found in large flocks in winter when it frequents patches of weeds and hemp and the borders of timber. Commonly seen about the houses in town in May and again in July and August, coming to breed.

7. *Spinus pinus*. PINE SISKIN.—Found plentifully in winter and at the approach of spring. A very unsuspicious bird often allowing one to advance within two or three feet of it while feeding. I have usually found them in small flocks of a dozen or more about pines and evergreens.

8. *Calcarius lapponicus*. LAPLAND LONGSPUR.—Casual winter visitor. Sometimes appearing late in the fall before the first snow. It is found associated with the Horned Larks. Often when a flock of Larks is flying overhead, I have heard the twittering notes of this Longspur coming from among them. In February when the river is usually frozen over, I have seen them on the ice where sand had been scattered by passing wagons.



9. *Calcarius pictus*. SMITH'S LONGSPUR. — The Painted Longspur is a regular spring and fall migrant through Illinois. It seems more plentiful in the fall than in the spring, and its sojourn is usually more protracted. I have found them on many occasions in the fall, from early October until the middle of November. At such times they frequent stubble fields of oats or wheat, which have been well grown up with short grass and weeds. I have also found large flocks of them among the lowlands about Lima Lake, where they lie closely in the short grass. This species is seldom found associated with other birds. They often congregate in large flocks of several hundreds, and when such a flock has settled in good cover one may approach fairly into the midst of them without becoming aware of their presence, until with one impulse all will arise and, uttering their rapid, twittering notes, circle about high in the air for some time, and perhaps fly far away, unless the intruder remain concealed and quiet, when they will drop in again all about him. During the migration one who is perfectly familiar with their note may often observe flocks of them flying rapidly over at a great height, often scarcely perceptible, and constantly uttering the notes, but unless he should find their particular feeding ground, it would be useless to search for them. This is particularly the case in the spring, when many flocks pass over, and should one alight and be disturbed, they seldom return, but seem restless and anxious to complete their long journey.

10. *Poocætes gramineus*. VESPER SPARROW. — Very common during migrations, not often remaining to breed, though occasionally its pleasing notes may be heard during the summer months.

11. *Ammodramus sandwichensis savanna*. SAVANNA SPARROW. — One of our most common Sparrows in spring and fall, often associated with other species of its genus as well as with the Song and Swamp Sparrows. It frequents the uplands where it may usually be found in stubble fields and patches of swamp grass or weeds.

12. *Ammodramus savannarum passerinus*. GRASSHOPPER SPARROW. — A common summer resident arriving by the middle of April, and frequenting the clover fields, where its familiar subdued notes may be heard throughout the spring and summer, as the bird sways in the breeze from a weed top, or crouches upon a fence post.

13. *Ammodramus henslowii*. HENSLOW'S SPARROW. — Abundant spring migrant, and not uncommon during the summer and fall, although then less conspicuous from its quietness and more restricted haunts. The migration takes place in April, and is at its height from the 15th until the 25th of that month. At this time the birds are in their best plumage, and their habits may be most successfully studied. From dawn until two or three hours after sunrise, while the dew still sparkles on the grass, they will be found most active and full of life. In this locality they not only frequent the marshes and bottom lands but are also found in upland clover fields and fields of timothy, and in fact I have discovered them in a great variety of places, though their favorite haunts seem to be among the dense growth of swamp grass of our bottom lands. I have known



several pairs to breed in a clover field of some ten acres or more, through which extends a swampy brook well lined with weeds and a few patches of tall grass. During the spring migration large numbers of this species, as well as Leconte's and the Yellow-winged Sparrow frequent this field, and often in an hour's walk I have flushed several dozen of them which on taking flight would usually seek the tall grass and weeds about the brook.

15. *Ammodramus leconteii*. LECONTE'S SPARROW.—Fully as abundant as the last species, and perhaps more evenly distributed locally. The habits of Leconte's Sparrow are similar to those of Henslow's, and its migration takes place at about the same time. My earliest record for the spring migration was on March 14, 1889, when I shot a single male bird which was flushed from among short blue-grass, in a large open field. This Sparrow like the last two is often found in wheat or oat stubble grown up with grass and smartweed, where the hollows usually contain thick shelter to which they resort when disturbed. The young Leconte's and Henslow's Sparrows are sometimes found in August in immature plumage, but as yet I have failed to find any positive proof of the former species breeding here.

16. *Ammodramus caudacutus nelsoni*. NELSON'S SPARROW.—Apparently of very rare occurrence here, as all my searches have revealed but a single specimen, a male shot on April 26, 1889, in a reedy marsh.

17. *Chondestes grammacus*. LARK SPARROW.—Common summer resident, reaching here from the south about May 1. Old pasture fields and fields of corn are most frequented by them, where they often sing for hours from the top of some dead tree. The nest is placed on or near the ground, often among crab sprouts in grassy places.

18. *Zonotrichia querula*. HARRIS'S SPARROW.—I have shot and preserved two specimens, a male and a female, of this species. They were found along a brush fence in a small clump of bushes where others were observed. The species is probably a regular, but rare, migrant as far east as the Mississippi bottoms.

19. *Zonotrichia leucophrys*. WHITE-CROWNED SPARROW.—A common migrant, more often seen in spring than fall when they migrate in small bands of half a dozen or more, sometimes in with flocks of the White-throated Sparrows. They seem to prefer bushy pastures and fences of osage hedge.

20. *Zonotrichia albicollis*. WHITE-THROATED SPARROW.—Found here in greater numbers than the last; both arrive from the south in some numbers by the middle of April and remain until about May 10. The song is very pleasant, though not loud.

21. *Spizella monticola*. TREE SPARROW.—Very common in winter. This and the Junco are found in about equal numbers in winter, both species remaining late in spring, sometimes until the first of May.

22. *Spizella socialis*. CHIPPING SPARROW.—Abundant summer resident, arriving sometimes by March 20. Two or three broods are raised here. The nests are built in shrubs and cedars in the city suburbs.



23. *Spizella pallida*. CLAY-COLORED SPARROW.—I have occasionally met with this species during the migrations. Early in May, 1887, I collected a number of specimens, and found them quite common in pasture and stubble fields near the city.

24. *Spizella pusilla*. FIELD SPARROW.—The Field Sparrow arrives from the south by the first of April, and is soon dispersed over the fields and pastures in considerable numbers. The song may be heard at any time in the spring or summer. Two broods at least are raised, and I have found the full set of fresh eggs by May 1. Nests are built in brush and bushes, among dead grass, or on the ground. I have found nests with eggs in cedar bushes five or six feet high.

25. *Junco hyemalis*. SLATE-COLORED JUNCO.—During the winter months this bird is common about the houses at the approach of or during storms. When the weather is pleasant they seek the fields and orchards or borders of woods where brush piles are found. I have records of the occurrence of this species as early as September 1, and on one occasion I met with a male bird on May 24, which was apparently in a sound state.

26. *Peucaea aestivalis bachmanii*. BACHMAN'S SPARROW.—Early in May, 1887, I shot three specimens of this bird and saw two others. They were in an old orchard of apple trees which were at that time in full blossom. In the spring of 1889, while searching the wooded bottom lands of Missouri just across the river from Quincy, I saw two others which, from the note and appearance, must have been of this species, though I was unable to obtain them. They were among scrub oaks and brush in a clearing. This was between the 1st and 5th of May; the exact date was not kept.

27. *Melospiza fasciata*. SONG SPARROW.—Common during migrations, and a very few remain throughout the year.

28. *Melospiza lincolni*. LINCOLN'S SPARROW.—Found in considerable numbers during the spring migrations about the first week in May. Less abundant in fall, and more irregular in its occurrence here.

29. *Melospiza georgiana*. SWAMP SPARROW.—In the spring and fall migrations this Sparrow is a common inhabitant of the bottom lands, or wherever rank grass, weeds, and brush are found. They are most abundant about the last of April, when all the marshes are full of them.

30. *Passerella iliaca*. FOX SPARROW.—Common in spring and fall. They arrive from the south by the middle of March, and often associate with the Towhee, seeking the deepest thickets and brush heaps, particularly in clearings where oak brush abounds. The song, which I have but rarely heard, is truly beautiful.

31. *Pipilo erythrophthalmus*. TOWHEE.—Abundant summer resident. It arrives from the south early in March, and nesting begins by April 1. I have found dozens of nests of this bird, from the middle of April until the last of August, with fresh eggs, and at least two thirds of those examined contained Cowbirds' eggs. They are built on the ground or in bushes near the ground. I have found them occasionally in roots or grass hanging along creek banks, and in the tops of fallen trees.



32. *Cardinalis cardinalis*. CARDINAL.—Abundant resident, particularly in the heavily wooded bottom lands of the Mississippi on both sides of the river. Nesting begins early in April or even by the last of March. I have found good-sized young by the middle of April. Nests are placed in bushes and thorn trees, near the ground, or in roots of fallen trees. The eggs are two, three, or four in number.

33. *Habia ludoviciana*. ROSE-BREADED GROSBILL.—Common summer resident. This is a well-known song bird, and is found in many parts of the city as well as in the deepest woods. The nests, of which I have examined a large number, are placed in the tops of trees and saplings. The eggs can be seen from below in most cases. They are from four to six in number.

34. *Passerina cyanea*. INDIGO BUNTING.—A well known bird in this locality, coming from the south in late April or by the first of May. By the last of May nesting has begun. Three or four eggs are deposited, and the Cowbird usually adds one or more. The nest is built in grass, weeds, or briars, or in the sprouts at the foot of a tree.

35. *Spiza americana*. DICKCISSEL.—Abundant summer resident, breeding in clover fields, where many nests can be found in a limited area. These are placed in the tops of clumps of clover or in shorter growth. I have found them sunk in the ground. The eggs are two, three, or four, in number.

---

## DESCRIPTIONS OF A NEW SPECIES AND THREE NEW SUBSPECIES OF BIRDS FROM ARIZONA.

BY DR. EDGAR A. MEARNS, U. S. A.

### *Junco ridgwayi*, sp. nov.

SP. CHAR. — Above similar to *J. caniceps*; below indistinguishable from *J. annectens*.

*Adult Male* (Type, No. 2770, Coll. E. A. Mearns, Whipple Barracks, Arizona, April 22, 1884): —Upper parts of head and neck, with rump, throat and jugulum, ash-gray. Lores grayish black. Scapulars and interscapular region bright rufous; outer webs of inner tertiaries tinged with the same. Abdomen and crissum white. Sides pinkish. Wings and tail dark grayish ash, the latter with the outer rectrix wholly white, the second white except a dusky line along each edge, and the third with a long white terminal stripe nearly confined to the inner web. Bill flesh color, slightly tipped with black. Feet and claws light brown. Length, 163; alar ex-



1890. "Notes on the Fringillidæ of Western Illinois." *The Auk* 7, 238–243.  
<https://doi.org/10.2307/4067982>.

**View This Item Online:** <https://www.biodiversitylibrary.org/item/54990>

**DOI:** <https://doi.org/10.2307/4067982>

**Permalink:** <https://www.biodiversitylibrary.org/partpdf/87389>

#### **Holding Institution**

Smithsonian Libraries and Archives

#### **Sponsored by**

Smithsonian

#### **Copyright & Reuse**

Copyright Status: Public domain. The BHL considers that this work is no longer under copyright protection.

This document was created from content at the **Biodiversity Heritage Library**, the world's largest open access digital library for biodiversity literature and archives. Visit BHL at <https://www.biodiversitylibrary.org>.