

Rare Wildlife Sighting Report

“Savannah Sparrow”
(*Passerculus sandwichensis*)

BR Environmental, LLC

54 Park Street

Florham Park, NJ 07932

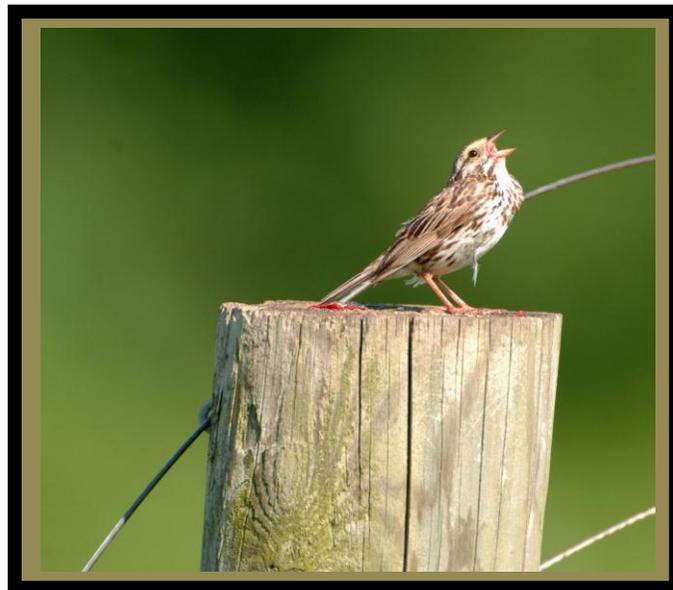
Report Submitted on Behalf of:

Wildlife Preserves, Inc.

One Gateway Center

Suite 2500

Newark NJ 07102



Rare Wildlife Sighting Report Form

Today's Date: *May 15, 2012*

Common Name: *Savannah Sparrow*

Scientific Name (*Passerculus sandwichensis*)

Status: *State Threatened*

Observation Site Location:

Known as "Troy Meadows" - Parsippany/ Troy Hills Twp./ Morris County/Abandoned Landfill/Directly adjacent SW of Ridgedale Avenue, Known as Tax Block 765, Lot 89 (Site Proper)

Location:

The site is located at the north-end of Troy Meadows, directly off Ridgedale Avenue/New Road in Parsippany-Troy Hills Twp., New Jersey, just west of the Whippany River. It is between the old abandoned East Hanover Airport and the Route 280-New Road Exit 1. The field where the sparrows are establishing or have been establishing a breeding site is located adjacent to and surrounded by the Troy Meadows Wildlife Preserve, behind a fence on an abandoned landfill known as Sharkey Landfill. (The site is a successful EPA Superfund Cleanup Site officially identified as the Northwest South fill.)

Location Map:

Ridgedale Avenue – Parsippany, New Jersey 07054
"Block 765, Lot 89"



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Savannah Sparrow (Passerculus sandwichensis)

Location Accuracy:

The sighting on the above aerial map is within 6m (20ft) of the animal's actual location on the ground.

Directions to Site:

Route 287 to Route 80 East to Route 280 East to New Road Exit 1, right onto New Road. Proceed approximately .6 miles until you see a fence and an open field on the right, just before the Whippany River Bridge. A gravel parking area is in front of a gate on the right.

Land Owner:

*CMDG Reality Co.
4866 ST Augustine Ct.
Colorado Springs, CO 80918*

Would you accompany a biologist to the site if needed:

Yes

Date and Approximate Time of the Observation:

May 5th, 10th, 13th, and 15th 2012; 10 am – 12pm, 7am – 1pm, 9am – 2pm, and 11am – 2pm respectively.

Main Concentration of Small Flocks (2-8 birds):

(Located with Magellan GPS Unit)

All 4 days sparrows were seen:

*Primary Calling and Activity Area: 40°50'42.95"N
74°21'03.06"W*

*Secondary Calling and Activity Area: 40°50'44.42"N
74°21'07.16"W*

*Tertiary Activity Area: 40°50'40.23"N
74°21'03.67"W*

Can you describe any immediate or future plan to develop or disturb the site?

Yes

The site is not going to be developed, however there is an imminent threat to the ecology of this mosaic of grassland/scrub habitat. PSE&G is planning to upgrade its Susquehanna-Roseland transmission line directly adjacent to and adjoining this site. PSE&G is planning to construct a new 500kV transmission line and has studied the site for (an alternate site) switching station, a construction yard and helicopter landing area. The site proper currently functions to support state threatened grassland dependent birds (savannah sparrow indicated herein). In addition this open scrub field is aiding in fulfilling life history requirements for state species of special concern, spotted sandpiper (Actitis macularius). Spotted sandpiper may be nesting on the site as they are actively seen along the adjacent Whippany River at all times of the day on all survey days noted. Block 765, Lot 81 is also acting as buffer habitat for the state endangered blue spotted salamander (Ambystoma laterale), and the state threatened red-shouldered hawk (Buteo lineatus). Forest interior species of special concern noted in woodland buffer spring 2012 include veery (Catharus fuscescens), and wood thrush (Hylocichla mustilina). Historically and presently breeding/nesting, sensitive marshland birds will also be threatened by the activities planned by Susquehanna-Roseland Transmission Project.

Conditions on the day(s) of Sighting:

Weather Conditions : *Clear, sunny, moderate cloud cover all days except May 15th – Light precipitation and heavy cloud cover*

Temperatures ranged from high 50's F in mornings to highs of upper 70's F (Sunday May 13th high of 79 degrees noted):

What was observed:

- How was the species identification made? Was it based on a sighting, tracks, call, or road kill? Name the identification manuals used or the experts consulted. Were there identification problems?

Blaine Rothauser (BR Environmental, LLC) made the identification based on the attached photographs of the species sighted (our complete C.V. is attached for your convenience). Mr. Rothauser has prepared and submitted to the Natural Heritage Program and the Endangered & Non-game Species Program numerous sightings of Threatened and Endangered species in the state of New Jersey. All sightings were accepted by NJDEP LURP program for inclusion in its GIS database (Biotics). No identification problems were encountered with P. sandwichensis – obvious, clear and concise identification features depicted in photographs (see images pg. 6 & 7).

Sightings were made while doing a routine survey for Blue spotted salamanders on Block 765, Lot 81. The first P.sandwichensis was spotted from this site on May 5th at 10am in the morning.

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Savannah Sparrow (*Passerculus sandwichensis*)

Detailed description and ID cross points indicated from photograph: Small drab sparrow/ brown above and white below/ brown streaking breast and sides. Evenly spaced streak spots and patterns on breast. Mottles dark and lighter brown streaking on back, nape, and crown

(variable)/ Tail short. Malar stripe and yellow lore's diagnostic (attached images define this clearly) Bill light pink, legs and feet pinkish add to diagnostic features.

Males were calling on all days except May 15th. Tsit, tsit, tsit, tsee, tssaay vocalization clearly heard. Males were calling directly from steel fence adjacent to Ridgedale Avenue on the 10th and 13th. Taller stalks of last year's Phragmites were also used as calling spires. All calling ceased after 10am on all days observed. The frequency and duration of the sightings (10 days) for *P. sandwichensis* at this site provide strong evidence to its fidelity as a breeding and nesting location.

These sparrows were seen in small flocks of between 3 and 8 birds on all days observed. Birds were foraging amongst forbs and taller reed grasses. On more than 6 occasions birds were seen chasing each other from place to place within the general confines of the site proper. We assume that these were males exhibiting territorial behavior in preparation for the nesting season.

Because this species is sexually monomorphic it was difficult to determine the age class and sex of birds sighted. Crown stripes in some birds were indistinct and may have been juveniles. The fact that a significant amount of sightings occurred over this 10 day period during the breeding portion of the birds life history might indicate fidelity to this site (natal philopatry is common for *P. sandwichensis*). In other words these sparrows may have been nesting here in prior breeding seasons.

The total open field acreage of the site proper is approximately 20 acres – well within the habitat parameters of breeding *P. sandwichensis*. I have seen this species in other hydrologically connected scrubby old fields associated with the black meadows 6 miles south east of the site proper (2002 – 2005) – these sparrows were exhibiting breeding behavior. The habitat of the site proper is consistent with the literature on breeding habitat for the species: “vegetated landfills”, *Endangered & Threatened Wildlife of NJ*, Bean 2003; “Breeders are tolerant of human disturbance at the nest. Pairs nest readily in human-made grasslands, such as abandoned surface mines”, *Birds of North America*, Cornell University, 2012. The herbaceous community throughout the site consists of thick, multistage and tiered forbs, herbs and grasses, sporadic saplings of black cherry and Russian olive were noted. The dominant plant found throughout this site is mugwort (*Artemisia vulgaris*), Canada goldenrod (*Solidago canadensis*) (sub-dominant). A mix of the following vegetation is found throughout the site: In wet depressional areas: Phragmites sp. Dominates, soft rush (*Juncus effusus*) (sub-dominant), *Carex pillita*, *Carex stipata*, *Carex scopara*, and *Carex stricta*. Mesic areas: Flat topped goldenrod (*Solidago graminifolia*), Wintercress (*Barbarea vulgaris*), Ground Ivy (*Glechoma hederacea*), Creeping buttercup (*Ranunculus ripens*), Common blue-eyed grass (*Sisyrinchium montanum*, common fleabane (*Erigeron philadelphicus*). Sporadic seedling and sapling shrubs and trees – very sporadic. Very few singing perches for sparrows in the interior of the site – mainly Phragmites stalks (+/-) 6' It should be noted that the habitat where the sparrows were located was biologically active during our field survey days as testified by attendance of bee flies, wasp mimics, spiders, early spring grasshoppers, butterflies sp(s), dragonfly sp(s), black rat snake, and the constant presence tree and barn swallow foraging over fields. Meadow voles (*Microtus pennsylvanicus*) were seen and many tunnels noted during our field survey. **Were photos taken?** Yes (page 6 & 7) **Were video recorded?** No **Were audio recorded?** No

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*Savannah Sparrow (*Passerculus sandwichensis*)*

Image Taken May 10th 2012 (7am)
(40°50'42.95"N)
(74°21'03.06"W)



© Blaine Rothauser

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© Blaine Rothouser

List manuals used or experts consulted to verify identification. Provide a brief background and

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knowledge/or expertise, or additional information that would add to the validity of the sighting.

No manuals used. 26 years of field experience and education with NJ's threatened and Endangered Species - C.V. attached.

Can this be verified by someone else or can anyone vouch for your identification skills?

Yes – John Thonet, Principal Thonet Associates Inc. (908) 238 0473. I was his chief naturalist / biologist between 1995–2006. Dr. Emile DeVito, Chief Land Steward, New Jersey Conservation Foundation. I have worked with Dr. DeVito on avian surveys throughout the state of New Jersey.

Describe any additional information that may be useful in regards to the condition of the animal or location.

The position of the site proper in the landscape is particularly suitable for the breeding portion of P. sandwichensis life history requirements. This is probably due to its isolation with human disturbance – humans cannot go beyond the fence and all three remaining sides are buffered by woodland, marsh and riverine habitats. The variety of ecotonal area as just indicated is also a favorable attribute for the species to breed.

Contact Information:

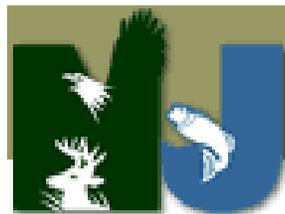
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Florham Park, New Jersey
(201) 919-0097 Office
(201) 978-5455 Mobile
(973) 301-2279 Fax
Email – blaine@e-naturaleyes.com*

Signature _____

I'm 18 or over and all information contained on this form and in the supporting documentation is true and accurate to the best of my knowledge.



Cc:



New Jersey Division of
Fish and Wildlife

Image of Field
Block 765, Lot 89
(Looking Over Steel Fence SouthWest)



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NOTES: