

NOTES ON THE FRINGILLINE GENUS *PASSERHERBULUS* AND ITS NEAREST ALLIES.

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A careful examination and comparison of the species of *Passerherbulus* at once discloses the fact that this genus as at present constituted is a composite group. The structural discrepancies between several of its species are such that it seems necessary to place them in different genera. The only other consistent course seems to be to merge *Passerherbulus* with *Ammodramus* and *Centronyx*, for the differences that separate these genera from *Passerherbulus* are no more important than the structural differences between the species of *Passerherbulus* itself. There seem to be four well-marked groups in *Passerherbulus* which are thus in need of generic definition, and this is the purpose of the present discussion.

The generic name *Passerherbulus* was first proposed by Mr. C. J. Maynard in 1895,¹ but from that date it is merely a nomen nudum, since the only indication of type is the citation of the name "LeConte's Bunting" without authority or other statement of origin; furthermore, this name does not occur elsewhere in Maynard's book, for on a previous page where the bird is described it is called LeConte's Sparrow. Therefore, according to the International Code of Nomenclature, the name *Passerherbulus* can not be cited as valid from this publication. Its earliest proper use seems to be by Stone in 1907,² when the type was given as *Ammodramus lecontei*; and thus, if only a single generic term be employed for this group, it must be *Ammospiza* Oberholser, 1905.³ However, as above indicated, this group should be separated into four, which are defined below.

Thryospiza, gen. nov.⁴

Chars. gen.—Similar to *Passerherbulus* Stone (type, *Emberiza leconteii* Audubon), but tail shorter than the wing—about nine-tenths of wing or somewhat more; first primary (counting from the outermost) shorter than the seventh; bill much lengthened, the wing only four to

¹Birds Eastern North Amer., ed. 2, pt. 40, 1895, p. 707.

²Auk, XXIV, April, 1907, p. 193.

³Smiths. Misc. Coll., Vol. 48, May 13, 1905, p. 68.

⁴From *θρύον*, juncus; and *σπίζα*, fringilla.

four and one-half times the length of the exposed culmen; bill relatively more slender, the length of exposed culmen decidedly more than twice the height of bill at base, the height at base very much less than the length of the gonys; and exposed culmen about equal to middle toe without claw.

Description.—Tail about nine-tenths of wing or somewhat more, but never as long as wing; first primary (counting from the outermost) shorter than the seventh, usually about equal to the eighth; bill much lengthened, the wing four to four and one-half times the length of exposed culmen; length of exposed culmen two and one-fourth to two and one-half times the height of bill at base; the height of bill at base about three-fourths of the length of gonys; exposed culmen about equal to middle toe without claw.

Type.—*Fringilla maritima* Wilson.

Remarks.—The seaside sparrows are, as above shown, very distinct in structural characters from the other birds commonly associated with them in the same generic group, and there is no doubt of the propriety of their generic segregation. The very long bill and much rounded wing, together with their other proportions, easily distinguish them. The species and subspecies included in this group are as follows:

Thryospiza maritima maritima (Wilson).

Thryospiza maritima macgillivraii (Audubon).

Thryospiza maritima peninsulæ (Allen).

Thryospiza maritima sennetti (Allen).

Thryospiza maritima fisheri (Chapman).

Thryospiza nigrescens (Ridgway).

Ammospiza Oberholser.

Ammodramus SWAINSON, Zool. Journ., III, August to November, 1827, p. 348, (type by original designation, *Fringilla caudacuta* Wilson) (nec *Ammodramus* Swainson, Philos. Mag., new series, I, June, 1827, p. 435, qui *Coturniculus* Bonaparte).

Ammospiza OBERHOLSER, Smiths. Misc. Coll., Vol. 48, May 13, 1905, p. 68, (type by original designation, *Oriolus caudacutus* Gmelin).

Chars. gen.—Similar to *Thryospiza*, but tail decidedly shorter, not over seven-eighths of wing; first primary (counting from the outermost) longer than sixth; bill stouter and only moderately lengthened, the length of exposed culmen about twice the height of bill at base; and exposed culmen very much less than middle toe without claw.

Description.—Tail three-fourths to seven-eighths of wing; first primary (counting from the outermost) longer than the sixth, sometimes

equaling the fifth; bill moderately lengthened, the wing four to four and one-half times the length of exposed culmen; length of exposed culmen about twice the height of bill at base; height of bill at base about three-fourths of length of gonys; exposed culmen much less than middle toe without claw, often barely more than length of the two basal phalanges.

Type.—*Oriolus caudacutus* Gmelin.

Remarks.—The above-given characters clearly show that the sharp-tailed sparrow (*Oriolus caudacutus* Gmelin) is not congeneric with the seaside sparrow (*Fringilla maritima* Wilson). The applicability of the generic name *Ammodramus* Swainson has already been fully discussed.¹

Some recent authors have considered the Nelson sparrow (*Ammodramus caudacutus nelsoni* Allen) specifically distinct from *Ammospiza caudacuta*, but the examination of a large amount of material now shows that intermediate specimens of varying degrees entirely connect the two, and that consequently the former must be a subspecies. The same is true of the Acadian sharp-tailed sparrow (*Ammodramus caudacutus subvirgatus* Dwight), which authors now consider a subspecies of *Ammospiza caudacuta nelsoni*.

The forms of this genus should, therefore, now stand as follows:

Ammospiza caudacuta (Gmelin).

Ammospiza caudacuta subvirgata (Dwight).

Ammospiza caudacuta nelsoni (Allen).

Passerherbulus Stone.

Passerherbulus STONE, Auk, XXIV, No. 2, April, 1907, p. 193 (ex Maynard, Birds Eastern North Amer., ed. 2, pt. 40, 1895, p. 707, *nomen nudum*) (type by original designation and monotypy, *Ammodramus lecontei* [= *Emberiza leconteii* Audubon]).

Chars. gen.—Similar to *Ammospiza*, but tail about equal to wing (sometimes a little shorter, sometimes slightly longer); first primary (counting from the outermost) longer than the fifth; bill short, but moderately slender, the wing five to five and one-half times the length of exposed culmen.

Description.—Tail slightly longer to slightly shorter than wing, usually about equal to wing; first primary (counting from the outermost)

¹Cf. Oberholser, Smiths. Coll., Vol. 48, May 13, 1905, p. 67.

longer than the fifth, sometimes about equal to the fourth; bill short, but moderately slender, the wing five to five and one-half times the length of exposed culmen; length of exposed culmen about twice the height of bill at base; height of bill at base less than length of gonys; exposed culmen less than middle toe without claw.

Type.—*Emberiza leconteii* Audubon.

Remarks.—The very short, somewhat slender bill and long tail of the type species of this monotypic group sufficiently distinguish it almost at a glance from the other related forms. The applicability of the name *Passerherbulus* Stone, ex Maynard, has been discussed above.¹

The sole species of this genus will now stand as:

Passerherbulus leconteii (Audubon).

Nemospiza, gen. nov.²

Chars. gen.—Similar to *Passerherbulus*, but tail decidedly shorter than wing; first primary (counting from the outermost) shorter than the fifth; bill short and very stout, the wing only four and one-half times the exposed culmen; length of exposed culmen one and one-half to one and three-fourths times the height of bill at base; height of bill at base about equal to the length of gonys.

Description.—Tail about ninety-five percent. of wing; first primary (counting from the outermost) usually longer than sixth and shorter than fifth; bill short, but very stout; wing four and one-half times the length of exposed culmen; length of exposed culmen one and one-half to one and three-fourths times the height of bill at base; height of bill at base about equal to gonys; exposed culmen less than middle toe without claw.

Type.—*Emberiza henslowii* Audubon.

Remarks.—The very short, stout bill and its big proportions at once separate the type of this genus from all of the species here treated.

The only forms of this genus are:

Nemospiza henslowii henslowii (Audubon).

Nemospiza henslowii occidentalis (Brewster).

¹*Antea*, p. 332.

²From *πέμος*, pascuum; and *στίζα*, fringilla.

The following key to the genus *Passerherbulus* and the three allied genera above diagnosed may serve to set forth more graphically their distinguishing characteristics:

- a*¹. Exposed culman not decidedly less than middle toe without claw; exposed culmen decidedly more than twice the height of bill at base; first primary (counting from the outermost) shorter than the seventh
Thryospiza.
- a*². Exposed culmen decidedly less than middle toe without claw; exposed culmen not decidedly more than twice the height of bill at base; first primary (counting from the outermost) longer than the seventh.
- b*¹. Wing decidedly more than four and one-half times the length of exposed culmen; tail about equal to wing; first primary (counting from the outermost) longer than fifth.....*Passerherbulus.*
- b*². Wing not decidedly more than four and one-half times the length of exposed culmen; tail decidedly shorter than wing; first primary (counting from the outermost) not longer than fifth.
- c*¹. Tail more than seven-eighths of wing; exposed culmen much less than twice the height of bill at base; height of bill at base about equal to length of gonys.....*Nemospiza.*
- c*². Tail not more than seven-eighths of wing; exposed culmen about twice the height of bill at base; height of bill at base decidedly less than length of gonys.....*Ammospiza.*

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