

The first record of Yellow-throated Sparrow *Gymnoris xanthocollis* in Jordan

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The breeding range of the Yellow-throated Sparrow *Gymnoris xanthocollis* extends from eastern Turkey and Iraq eastwards to central Asia (Clements *et al* 1993). The Middle Eastern breeding populations are migratory and winter mainly in India. Vagrants have been recorded in Kuwait and Israel (Shirihai 1996, Snow & Perrins 1998). Recent records of breeding birds along the Euphrates, in Syria in 2003 (Murdoch 2005) and in southeast Turkey since 1977 (Snow & Perrins 1998), indicate a possible westward range expansion within the Middle East. We document here the first record of this species for Jordan, at Al-Shaumari reserve (31° 45' 11" N, 36° 45' 22" E), which is located near Azraq in the eastern desert. On 1st June 2011 while carrying out a ringing training-session at the reserve, two small sparrows were trapped in the same mist net during the 08.00 h morning round. The first bird to be inspected, the female, was a small sparrow with a conical, pointed beak. The bases of the throat feathers were yellow, but this feature could not be seen unless they were parted. After checking the bird guides, the bird was identified as a female Yellow-throated Sparrow (see following description). The male was handled after the female and was immediately identified as of this species. Both were measured, ringed and photographed, and then released on site. The record has been accepted by the Jordan Bird Records Committee (JBRC).

Female (Plate 1): small sparrow-like bird; crown feathers were erected by the bird while being handled; bill was long, conical and pointed; wing length 77 mm, tail length 50 mm; weight 19.3 g. Upperparts were generally pale brown and featureless, with two pale wing-bars, the upper bar (on the tips of the median coverts) being more distinct. The underparts were featureless off-white, paler towards the belly. The bases of the central throat feathers were yellow (a feature usually not seen in the field). The head markings included a pale (off-white) supercilium and a narrow dark eye-stripe. The iris



Plate 1. Female Yellow-throated Sparrow *Gymnoris xanthocollis*, Shaumari reserve, Jordan, 1 June 2011. © Lou'ai Azzam RSCN

was black, the tarsus pale brown and the bill pale brown-pinkish, darker towards the tip. This bird did not have an obvious brood patch or juvenile feathers.

Male (Plate 2): Same shape as female; wing length 81 mm, tail 53 mm, weight 19.2 g. The upper-parts were uniform pale brown, with two pale wing-bars, the upper (median covert bar) being very distinct; the lesser coverts were partly chestnut-brown. The breast was



Plate 2. Male Yellow-throated Sparrow *Gymnoris xanthocollis*, Shaumari reserve, Jordan, 1 June 2011. © Lou'ai Azzam RSCN

pale brown-greyish with a well-defined yellow patch on the throat; the belly was much paler. The head was generally pale grayish-beige with a narrow, dark grey eye-stripe and indistinct pale supercilium. The iris and bill were black.

Subsequent field visits carried out by YS to Shaumari in June 2011 did not produce further records. However, the site holds a large population of House Sparrows *Passer domesticus* and a few pairs of Spanish Sparrows *Passer hispaniolensis*, so a small breeding population of Yellow-throated Sparrows could easily be overlooked. They were caught in the same mist nest, and thus appeared to be associated, and were recorded during the breeding season/near the end of the spring migration period for this species (Snow & Perrins 1998, Kirwan *et al* 2008). The small patch of habitat where they were caught is unusual for Shaumari reserve and the Azraq area; it consists of irrigated plantations of tamarisk (*Tamarix* sp) and large eucalyptus trees near small buildings. The surroundings of Azraq also include potentially suitable agricultural habitat. Given the well-documented spread in Turkey (Kirwan *et al* 2008) and possible expansion into Syria, the colonization of Shaumari and Azraq by Yellow-throated Sparrows seems a strong possibility.

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