

TEST YOUR SKILLS:

Is it a Chipping or a Clay-colored Sparrow?

by David B. Johnson

Readers will recall field identification tips and illustrations for the juvenile and basic (winter) Chipping and Clay-colored Sparrows in the last two issues of *Meadowlark*. Now test your knowledge. Examine the photographs of museum skins below taken at the Field Museum of Natural History in Chicago. Which is Chipping and which is Clay-colored? (*correct answers appear at the bottom of page 120*)

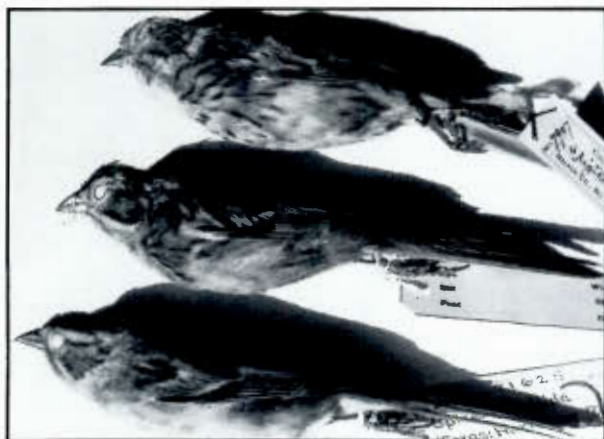


Figure 1.



Figure 2.

(David B. Johnson photos)

As you may have guessed, what is strikingly different about the two species is that, in both the juvenile and basic plumages, the Clay-colored Sparrow has bright buffy and white overtones. The Chipping Sparrow has an overall gray coloration.

The basic Chipping Sparrow tends to have a reddish brown color in the back, crown, and face. The Clay-colored has white to buffy overtones, particularly in the face.

The Clay-colored also has buffy lores and no eyeline, giving it a pale-lored appearance. In a juvenile, the malar area is buffy to white. Also, the three-cornered ear patch of the Clay-colored Sparrow in both shown plumages is darker etched at its borders than it is in the Chipping Sparrow in both plumages.

The Clay-colored Sparrow, in both juvenile and basic plumages, has a gray nape, which is nearly absent on the juvenile chippie. In the basic chippie, the gray nape blends in with the gray sides of its head, neck, and upper breast. The basic Clay-colored Sparrow has its neck set off by a buffy upper breast and white malar area.

I would like to thank Dr. David Willard of the Chicago Field Museum of Natural History for permission to examine Chipping and Clay-colored Sparrow museum tray skins. ■

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