

From: Birds Queensland Rarities Appraisal Committee (BQ RAC)

Date: 16 May 2018

Submission No 196 Eurasian Tree Sparrow *Passer montanous* submitted by Ben Bright

This case involves a single Eurasian Tree Sparrow observed and photographed on the 2nd April 2018. This sparrow was observed sitting on the bow railing of a pilot boat approximately 25 km south-west of Weipa, in the Gulf of Carpentaria (12° 43' 36"S; 141° 37' 48"E). From the description and photographs provided there is no doubt that the bird observed was a Eurasian Tree Sparrow, because of the combination of dark patch on a larger white cheek patch, a chestnut brown crown and nape and a white collar around the back of the neck. These characters are sufficient to separate this species from the House Sparrow, which has grey crown and lacks both a collar around the back of the neck and a white cheek patch.

Eurasian Tree Sparrows are known to occur throughout most of Europe and Asia south to the Philippines and eastern Indonesian (Menkhorst *et. al.* 2017). Pratt and Belcher (2015) stated that Eurasian Tree Sparrows became established from ship assisted birds in New Guinea only in the last few years. Although known from southeastern Australia for many decades, this species has only recently been reported in northern Australian. Most of these reports have been in towns with large ports and the sparrows are thought to have been ship assisted (Higgins *et. al.* 2006). Shortly after this record was submitted, a second Eurasian Tree Sparrow submission was received by the Birds Queensland Rarities Appraisal Committee involving observations of this species on islands in the Torres Strait, but also included some known records from other islands in this region (Spry 2018).

Although these Eurasian Tree Sparrows may have arrived in northern Australian through natural dispersal, it has not been possible to rule out that these birds, including the current record (BQ RAC 196), arrived via ship assistance. Even if these Eurasian Tree Sparrows are ship assisted birds there is nothing in the current rules of the Guidelines of the Birds Queensland Records Appraisal Committee ('Queensland Ornithological Society Inc. Guidelines of the Records Appraisal Committee' Anon, undated) that would preclude the present record from being assessed under the Committee's usual processes.

Record unanimously accepted

This is the first record of Eurasian Tree Sparrow to be assessed by the BQ RAC.

References

- Anon, undated. Queensland Ornithological Society Inc.: Guideline of the Records Appraisal Committee. An unpublished Birds Queensland (QOSI Inc.) document.
- Higgins, P.J., Peter, J.M. and Cowling, S.J. (Eds) 2006. *Handbook of Australian, New Zealand and Antarctic Birds. Volume 7: Boatbill to Starlings*. Oxford University Press, Melbourne.
- Menkhorst, P., Rogers, D., Clarke, R., Davies, J., Marsack, P. and Franklin, K. 2017. *The Australian Bird Guide*. CSIRO Publishing, Clayton South.
- Spry, J. 2018. Birds Queensland Rarities Appraisal Committee submission case number 197. An unpublished submission to the Birds Queensland Rarities Appraisal Committee.