

From: Birds Queensland Rarities Appraisal Committee (BQ RAC)

Date: Between 5th March and 1st April 2018

Submission No 197 Eurasian Tree Sparrow *Passer montanous* submitted by Jennifer Spry

This case involves more than 30 Eurasian Tree Sparrows, *Passer montanous*, observed between 5th March and 1st April 2018 in the village area on Boigu Island (9° 13' 47" S; 142° 13' 47" E) and Saibai Islands (9° 22' 49" S; 142° 36' 47" E) in northern Torres Strait. The submission was supported with a series of photographs of some of these Eurasian Tree Sparrows. The observer indicated that the surrounding mangroves and tall rank grasslands on these islands did not appear to provide suitable habitat for these sparrows. From the description and photographs provided there is no doubt that the birds observed were Eurasian Tree Sparrows, because of the combination of dark patch on a larger white check 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, *P. domesticus*, which has grey crown and lacks both a collar around the back of the neck and a white check 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 Guineas only in the last few years. Although known from southeastern Australia for many decades, this species has only recently been reported in northern Australian in the last few years. Most of these reports have been in town with large port and the sparrows are thought to have been ship assessed (Higgins *et. al.* 2006).

Although these Eurasian Tree Sparrow 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 197 and the other recent record from north Queensland, Weipa BQ RAC case 196) have been ship assisted.

Even though it has not been possible to determine how the Eurasian Tree Sparrows arrived on Boigu Island and Saibai Island, there is nothing in the current rules of Guidelines of the Birds Queensland Records Appraisal Committee ('Queensland Ornithological Society Inc. Guidelines of the Records Appraisal Committee' Document Anon, undated) that would preclude a ship assisted record from being assessed under the Committee's usual processes.

Record unanimously accepted

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

References

Anon, undated. Queensland ornithological 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.

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