



ROBERT A. HAMILTON

April 5, 2008

Gregg Howald & Will Murray
Island Conservation
100 Shaffer Road, Long Marine Lab, Center for Ocean Health
Santa Cruz, California 95060

**SUBJECT: REVISED REPORT ON RUFIOUS-CROWNED SPARROW SURVEY
WEST ANACAPA ISLAND**

Dear Gregg and Will,

On 3 March 2008, Richard Erickson, Peter Gaede, Laurie Harvey, and I conducted a focused survey for the Santa Cruz Island Rufous-crowned Sparrow (*Aimophila ruficeps obscura*) on West Anacapa Island. This letter report describes the methods and provides the results of our survey, including a map showing our approximate survey route and the location of Rufous-crowned Sparrows we found.

METHODS

We landed on the west end of the island and hiked up to the top. We covered most of the top of the island, splitting up part of the time to achieve better coverage. Gaede and I played digital recordings of Rufous-crowned Sparrow songs and calls using portable amplified speakers in order to elicit responses from any Rufous-crowned Sparrows that might be present. I had covered some of the lower slopes of West Anacapa Island a year earlier, on 10 March 2007, by playing digital recordings from an inflatable boat that circumnavigated the island, as close to the shoreline as possible, with negative results (see my letter report to Island Conservation dated 16 March 2008). We did not survey only the flatter parts of the island, but also played recordings down the steep sides of the island and waited for any possible responses. We were present on the island from approximately 10:15 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. Conditions were clear and mild, with moderate wind. Erickson took notes of the wildlife species we detected on the island.

RESULTS

We detected the following wildlife species on and immediately around West Anacapa Island. Most species were seen by all members of the team.

cf. darter	1	cf. Spot-winged Glider	1
Variegated Meadowhawk	3	Gray Hairstreak	1

blue sp.	1
West Coast Lady	1
lady sp.	4
Common Side-blotched Lizard	2
+ 10 lizards probably this species	
Southern Alligator Lizard	3
Surf Scoter	25
Brown Pelican	many
Brandt's Cormorant	many
Pelagic Cormorant	several
Bald Eagle	1 imm.
Northern Harrier	1 female
Sharp-shinned Hawk	1
Red-tailed Hawk	1
Peregrine Falcon	2
Glaucous-winged Gull	1
Western Gull	many
Mourning Dove	1
Anna's Hummingbird	1
Allen's Hummingbird	8
some males displaying	

Black Phoebe	2
Cassin's Kingbird	1
Common Raven	2
Bewick's Wren	28, singing
Hermit Thrush	3
Orange-crowned Warbler ..	35, singing
Audubon's Warbler	2
Spotted Towhee	1
Rufous-crowned Sparrow	2 pairs
see the following discussion	
Song Sparrow	4, incl. singing
White-crowned Sparrow	18
at least one <i>pugetensis</i>	
Golden-crowned Sparrow	4
House Finch	1
California Sea Lion	2
Harbor Seal	2

DISCUSSION

We found two pairs of Rufous-crowned Sparrows at the eastern end of the island, on the gentle, northeast-facing slope of upper Cherry Canyon (NAD 83 GPS coordinates = 11S 0276354; 3765795; see Figure 1). The birds, which responded to playback, were in dense scrub dominated by *Coreopsis gigantea*, *Artemisia californica*, *Dudleya caespitosa*, and *Lycium californicum*, with abundant grasses and forbs.



Figure 1. Approximate survey route and location of Rufous-crowned Sparrows on 3 March 2008.

We were taken by surprise when we finally found the first pair of Rufous-crowned Sparrows, as we had covered much of the island with no luck. As the following photos show, the island was lush and green, and much of the island appeared to be potentially suitable for occupation by Rufous-crowned Sparrows. During the 1960s and 1970s this



Figure 2. Photograph of Rufous-crowned Sparrow at head of Cherry Canyon, 3 March 2008. This bird was paired, and we later found another pair in the same area (the two pairs were seen simultaneously).

sparrow was regarded as “common” to “fairly common” on Middle and West Anacapa Islands¹. The recent species account by P. W. Collins states that the species:

... is restricted to West and Middle Anacapa for breeding and is occasionally seen on East Anacapa². That landbird population monitoring on East Anacapa has detected this species on only one fall survey since 1993³ probably reflects the placement of survey transects on trails along flat terraces rather than on the steeper slopes that the species apparently prefers.

As detailed in my previous report, dated 16 March 2007, I found no Rufous-crowned Sparrows on East and Middle Anacapa Islands (or on limited portions of the lower slopes of West Anacapa Island that could be surveyed from boat) during focused surveys conducted 8–10 March 2007. During those surveys, I used playback of songs and calls to elicit responses from this species and did not limit my surveys to the flat parts of the islands. The ease with which I found Rufous-crowned Sparrows around the east end of Santa Cruz Island on 11 March 2007 (six pairs and two individuals in three hours of afternoon surveys) demonstrated the responsiveness of this species to playback of its songs and calls in early March, and hence the effectiveness of these survey methods. Clearly, this sparrow is much scarcer on West Anacapa Island than it was in the 1960s and 1970s, and last year’s negative survey results for Middle and East Anacapa Islands suggest to me that the species is probably absent or very scarce on those islands. Nevertheless, the presence of at least two pairs on West Anacapa Island in March 2008 demonstrates that the species remains extant there.

¹ P. W. Collins. 2008. Santa Cruz Island Rufous-crowned Sparrow *Aimophila ruficeps obscura* in California Bird Species of Special Concern 2006 [W. D. Shuford and T. Gardali, eds.]. Studies W. Birds 1.

² Collins, P. W., and Jones, H. L. in press. Birds of California’s Channel Islands: Their Status and Distribution. Santa Barbara Mus. Nat. Hist., Santa Barbara, CA.

³ Fancy, S. G. 2000. Review of the Channel Islands National Park landbird monitoring protocol. Unpubl. report to Channel Islands Natl. Park, 1901 Spinnaker Dr., Ventura, CA 93001.

Thank you for the opportunity to conduct this interesting survey. Please call me at 562-477-2181 if you wish to discuss any issues; you may send e-mail to robb@rahamilton.com.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Robert A. Hamilton".

Robert A. Hamilton
Consulting Biologist

attachments: Photos of West Anacapa Island

cc: Josh Donlan, Bernie Tershy



Figure 3. Adult Brown Pelican soaring off the island's west end.

Figure 4. Island Padre's Shooting Star (*Dodecatheon clevelandii* ssp. *insulare*) was in full bloom.



Figure 5. The island's west end with Santa Cruz Island in the distance. West Anacapa was lush and green; Giant Coreopsis (*Coreopsis gigantea*, shown here in the foreground) was just starting to bloom. Conditions were much drier in March 2007, when I surveyed Middle and East Anacapa Islands and the east end of Santa Cruz Island.



Figure 6. Maritime scrub near the head of Cherry Canyon, on the island's east end, where we found the two pairs of Rufous-crowned Sparrows. The dominant species were Giant Coreopsis (*Coreopsis gigantea*), California Sagebrush (*Artemisia californica*), Sea Lettuce (*Dudleya caespitosa*), California Boxthorn (*Lycium californicum*), etc., with abundant grasses and forbs.

Figure 7. Richard Erickson, Peter Gaede, and Laurie Harvey ascend the steep, west-facing slope that leads to the island's main ridge.





Figure 8. Peter Gaede and Laurie Harvey survey scrub on the middle of the island, just off the main ridge.



Figure 9. The island's south-facing slopes are too treacherous to hike, but we did our best to survey them through playback of Rufous-crowned Sparrow recordings from the tops of the slopes.