

Two Chipping Sparrows with Wing-tip Growths

Both Sparrows were young of the year, found in August, though in different years



3678. A 14mm-diameter spherical, pink tumour was hanging from the underside of the tip of the right wing, engulfing one primary feather; the skin was so thin that blood-vessels could be seen inside. It was an enormous load for a Chipping, one of the smallest sparrows—for example at 10g it is only half the weight of a Song Sparrow. Though well fed, the sparrow could not get about much with this growth, which had a blackened, scabbed depression on its underside from being dragged along the ground. For interest we took an X-Ray.



3678 X-Ray (taken on its back)

Then under anaesthetic, I nicked the skin and the tumour simply rolled out, suggesting that it was a benign growth. It looked like a small white brain with blood-vessels. There was virtually no bleeding, there was a fine recovery and the sparrow could fly, though not far.

But curiously, eleven days later, new bulbous, pale growths appeared at the same site on both surfaces, further incapacitating the sparrow. Euthanasia. The new growths proved to be filled with whitish matter.



#4696. Again there was a huge fleshy growth on the tip of a wing, engulfing one of the primary feathers, but this time it was pedunculated. The growth was cold, purplish, with the underside eroded like that of #3678 from being dragged on the ground. The sparrow was thin, and this time we just observed.

Six days later, the growth had shrunk a bit, turned black and hard, and as the sparrow moved about, it rattled as if a pebble was inside a hollow shell. There was also now a hole in it which looked as if a parasite might have emerged. The sparrow was feeble and losing weight; once again we could not help the little bird, and so put it to sleep. On post-mortem there was also a lesion on his side and on his beak.

If anyone has information as to what these growths might have been, it would be of great interest for us to find out.



#4696 with huge ?tumour on left wing

Kit Chubb