



Sparrows: more than just “little brown birds”

If you're like most people, the little brown birds flitting around the bushes all look the same. But upon closer inspection, you might find the variety surprising and soon recognize the distinctive markings described here.

It also helps to know that some of our sparrows leave us for tropic climes in the winter, **while other sparrows visit us only in winter**, having left their summer breeding grounds in Canada.

Most sparrows eat seeds and will visit feeders (though some prefer the seed dropped on the ground below). If you'd like to try your hand at sparrows this winter, **please enjoy our bird viewing porch**, complete with binoculars, field guides, and a little shelter from the wind and cold.

To find the porch, go up the ramp and to the right at the farm house (building closest to this kiosk).

White-Crowned Sparrow



Appearance: Clear pale grayish breast and black and white striped crown.

Habitat: Brush, fence rows, thickets.

Young males learn the basics of songs during the first two or three months of its life. It does not learn directly from its father, but rather from the generalized song environment of its neighborhood. Because of this, and the fact that they do not travel far from where they were raised, song dialects frequently form. Males on the edge of two dialects may be bilingual and able to sing both dialects.

Song Sparrow



Appearance: Heavily brown-striped breast with a large central spot.

Habitat: A common permanent resident found in gardens and woodland borders and along roadsides.

It lives up to its name, being a very persistent singer. Song is three clear introductory notes followed by a lively, varied musical trill. They are often heard on cold, but sunny winter days.

A unique habit of the song sparrow is their tendency to pump their tails in flight.

Field Sparrow



Appearance: Brownish sparrow with plain buffy breast, rusty red cap and unusual pink bill.

Habitat: Brushy successional habitats (abandoned fields with scattered saplings).

Year around Ohio resident, though more commonly seen in the summer. **On Audubon's "Common Birds in Decline"** list; population has declined in Ohio by 3.5% /year since 1966 due to loss of habitat.

Has a very sweet, melodic quality to its songs, and the trill speeds up at the end, sounding much like a ping-pong ball that is dropped and bounces to a stop.

White-Throated Sparrow



Appearance: Distinctive white throat patch, black and white stripes on head and yellow “eyebrows.” Stripes may be duller (tan and brown) in the winter.

Habitat: Thickets, undergrowth of conifer and mixed woodlands. Usually on the ground at feeders.

Although they look nothing alike, the white-throated sparrow and the dark-eyed junco occasionally mate and produce hybrids.

Tree Sparrow



Appearance: Mostly gray with reddish-brown cap and ear stripe. One dark spot in center of the breast. Bill is dark above and yellow below.

Habitat: Thickets of willow or birch and fields with scattered shrubs.

The tree sparrow is a common winter visitor in backyards across southern Canada and the northern U.S. Despite its name, it forages on the ground, nests on the ground, and breeds primarily above treeline in the far North.

House Sparrow



Appearance: Male has gray body and crown, black throat, and white cheeks. The female is dull brown with a pale eyebrow.

Habitat: Originally from Eurasia, the house sparrow was introduced here in 1851. It is very common in areas associated with humans, including urban and agricultural areas.

The house sparrow is unrelated to our native sparrow species. It is very aggressive, and has caused the decline of species like bluebirds that it outcompetes for cavity nesting sites.

Takes frequent “dust baths” by throwing soil and dust over its body, just as if it water.

Chipping Sparrow



Appearance: Plain gray breast, a solid rusty cap, and a black-and-white eye stripe.

Habitat: Breeds in open woodlands with grass, along river and lake shorelines, orchards, farms, and in urban and suburban parks.

Nest a loosely woven open cup of rootlets, grasses, and other fine materials. It is usually placed in small tree or shrub, and of such flimsy construction that light can be seen through it.

Winter

Year Around

Summer