

Song sparrow

From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

The **song sparrow** (*Melospiza melodia*) is a medium-sized American sparrow. Among the native sparrows in North America, it is easily one of the most abundant, variable and adaptable species.

Contents

- 1 Description
- 2 Distribution and life history
- 3 Eggs
- 4 Song
- 5 Predators and parasites
- 6 Subspecies
 - 6.1 Eastern group
 - 6.2 Northwestern group
 - 6.3 Cismontane California group
 - 6.4 Southwestern group
 - 6.5 Mexican Plateau group
- 7 Conservation status
- 8 References
- 9 Further reading
- 10 External links

Description

Adult song sparrows have brown upperparts with dark streaks on the back and are white underneath with dark streaking and a dark brown spot in the middle of the breast. They have a brown cap and a long brown rounded tail. Their face is gray with a streak through the eye. They are highly variable in size across numerous subspecies (for subspecies details, see below). The body length ranges from 11 to 18 cm (4.3 to 7.1 in) and wingspan can range from 18 to 25.4 cm (7.1 to 10.0 in).^{[2][3]} Body mass ranges from 11.9 to 53 g (0.42 to 1.87 oz).^[4] The average of all races is 32 g (1.1 oz) but the widespread nominate subspecies (*M. m. melodia*) weighs only about 22 g (0.78 oz) on average. The maximum lifespan in the wild is 11.3 years.^[5]

In the field, they are most easily confused with its congener the Lincoln's sparrow, and the Savannah sparrow. The former can be recognized by its shorter, grayer tail and the differently-patterned head, the brown cheeks forming a clear-cut angular patch. The

Song sparrow



in Whitby, Ontario, Canada

0:00

MENU

Conservation status



Least Concern (IUCN 3.1)^[1]

Scientific classification

Kingdom:	Animalia
Phylum:	Chordata
Class:	Aves
Order:	Passeriformes
Family:	Emberizidae
Genus:	<i>Melospiza</i>
Species:	<i>M. melodia</i>

Binomial name

Melospiza melodia

(Wilson, 1810)



Range of *M. melodia*

- Breeding range
- Year-round range

Savannah sparrow has a forked tail and yellowish flecks on the face when seen up close.

Distribution and life history

Although they are a habitat generalist,^[6] their favorite habitat is brushy areas and marshes, including salt marshes, across most of Canada and the United States. They also thrive in human areas, such as in suburbs, along edges in agricultural areas, and along roadsides. In southern locations, they are permanent residents. Northern birds migrate to the southern United States or Mexico, where there is also a local population resident all year round. The song sparrow is a very rare vagrant to western Europe, with a few recorded in Great Britain and Norway.

These birds forage on the ground, in shrubs or in very shallow water. They mainly eat insects and seeds. Birds in salt marshes may also eat small crustaceans. They nest either in a sheltered location on the ground or in trees or shrubs.

Eggs

The song sparrow lays three to five eggs which are a brown spotted greenish-white.

Song

The sparrow species derives its name from its colorful repertoire of songs. Enthusiasts report that one of the songs heard often in suburban locations closely resembles the opening four notes of Ludwig van Beethoven's Symphony No. 5. The male uses a fairly complex song to declare ownership of its territory and attract females.

Singing itself consists of a combination of repeated notes, quickly passing isolated notes, and trills. The songs are very crisp, clear, and precise, making them easily distinguishable by human ears. A particular song is determined not only by pitch and rhythm but also by the timbre of the trills. Although one bird will know many songs—as many as 20 different tunes with as many as 1000 improvised variations on the basic theme,—unlike thrushes, the song sparrow usually repeats the same song many times before switching to a different song.

Song sparrows typically learn their songs from a handful of other birds that have neighboring territories. They are most likely to learn songs that are shared in common between these neighbors. Ultimately, they will choose a territory close to or replacing the birds that they have learned from. This allows the song sparrows to address their neighbors with songs shared in common with those neighbors. It has been demonstrated that song sparrows are able to distinguish neighbors from strangers on the basis of song, and also that females are able to distinguish (and prefer) their mate's songs from those of other neighboring birds, and they prefer songs of neighboring birds to those of strangers.

Predators and parasites

Common predators of the song sparrow include cats, hawks, and owls, however snakes, dogs, and the American kestrel are treated ambiguously, suggesting that they are less of a threat. The song sparrow recognizes enemies by both instinctual and learned patterns (including cultural learning), and adjusts its

Wintering range

Synonyms

Melospiza cinerea



Singing in Delaware USA

future behavior based on both its own experiences in encounters, and from watching other birds interact with the enemies. Comparisons of experiments on hand-raised birds to observation of birds in the wild suggest that the fear of owls and hawks is instinctual, but fear of cats is learned.^[7]

Song sparrows' nests are parasitized by the brown-headed cowbird. The cowbirds' eggs closely resemble song sparrows' eggs, although the cowbirds' eggs are slightly larger. Song sparrows recognize cowbirds as a threat and attack the cowbirds when they are near the nest. There is some evidence that this behavior is learned rather than instinctual.^[7] A more recent study found that the behavior of attacking female cowbirds near nests may actually attract cowbird parasitism because the female cowbirds use such behavior to identify female song sparrows that are more likely to successfully raise a cowbird chick.^[8] One study found that while cowbird parasitism did result in more nest failure, overall there were negligible effects on song sparrow populations when cowbirds were introduced to an island. The study pointed to a number of explanatory factors including song sparrows raising multiple broods, and song sparrows' abilities to raise cowbird chicks with their own.^[9]

Subspecies

The song sparrow is one of the birds with the most numerous subspecies in North America, and even on a global scale rivals such species as the horned lark, the yellow wagtail, the golden whistler or the island thrush; 52 subspecies were named altogether, of which 24 are now considered valid.^{[10][11]} It is a cryptic species.

Eastern group

Small, brownish, long-winged forms with strong black streaks.

- *Melospiza melodia melodia* (Wilson, 1810). The nominate subspecies. Eastern half of North American range except coastal areas south from New York State. In winter, they migrate southeastwards. Very contrasting, very light with black streaks below, and gray margins to back feathers. This population includes the forms named as *M. m. juddi* Bishop, 1896; *M. m. acadica* Thayer and Bangs, 1914; *M. m. beata* (*non* Bangs) Todd, 1930; *M. m. euphonia* Wetmore, 1936; *M. m. callima* Oberholser, 1974; and *M. m. melanchra* Oberholser, 1974.
- *Melospiza melodia atlantica* Todd, 1924. Inhabits the Atlantic Coast salt marshes from New York State southwards; does not migrate. Differs from nominate by a gray back. Includes *M. m. rossignolii* Bailey, 1936.
- *Melospiza melodia montana* Henshaw, 1884. The subspecies west of *melodia* to the Rocky Mountains. Some birds from the northern part of its range migrate to north-west Mexico in winter. Similar to nominate, but larger, duller coloration and more slender bill. Includes *M. m. fisherella* Oberholser, 1911.

Northwestern group

Large, dark, diffuse dark streaks. A study of mtDNA allozyme variation of most forms in this group concluded that they are of comparatively recent origin and that island populations are apparently derived independently from each other.^[12]

- *Melospiza melodia maxima* Gabrielson & Lincoln, 1951, **giant song sparrow**. W Aleutian Islands (Attu to Atka Island), resident. The largest subspecies, about the size of the California Towhee. Very gray overall, long, diffuse streaks. Bill long and slender.

- *Melospiza melodia sanaka* McGregor, 1901, **Aleutian song sparrow**. Aleutians from Seguam Island east to Stepovak Bay, Alaska, and islands to the south of Alaskan Peninsula; resident. Similar to *maxima*; grayer still and bill even more slender. Includes the **Semidi song sparrow**, *M. m. semidiensis* Brooks, 1919, which may be a distinct subspecies however.^[13] Also includes the population from Amak Island^[14] named *M. m. amaka* Gabrielson & Lincoln, 1951 (**Amak song sparrow**) which was extirpated due to habitat destruction, apparently disappearing in the weeks around New Year's Eve, 1980/1981 (there were unconfirmed sightings in 1987 and 1988).
- *Melospiza melodia insignis* Baird, 1869, **Bischoff song sparrow**. Kodiak, Afognak, Sitkalidak, and Raspberry Islands, and Kukak and Katmai on Alaska Peninsula; many migrate south in winter. A darkish gray, medium-sized form.
- *Melospiza melodia kenaiensis* Ridgway, 1900, **Kenai song sparrow**. Resident; Pacific coast of Kenai Peninsula and Prince William Sound islands; some resident, some migrant. Smaller and browner than *insignis*.
- *Melospiza melodia caurina* Ridgway, 1899, **Yakutat song sparrow**. Northern Gulf of Alaska coast, many migrate to Pacific Northwest in winter. A smaller version of *kenaiensis*.
- *Melospiza melodia rufina* (Bonaparte, 1850), **sooty song sparrow**. Outer islands of Alexander Archipelago and Haida Gwaii (Queen Charlotte Islands); most are resident. A very dark, rufous, and small form. Includes *M. m. kwaisa* Cumming, 1933.
- *Melospiza melodia morphna* Oberholser, 1899. Coastal region of central British Columbia south to NW Oregon; resident. Lighter, more rufous than *rufina*. Previously *M. m. cinerea* (*non* Gmelin) (Audubon, 1839); *M. m. phaea* Fisher, 1902 are Central Oregon hybrids between this subspecies and *M. m. cleonensis*.
- *Melospiza melodia merrilli* Brewster, 1896. Occurs between the ranges of *morphna* and *montana* south to N Nevada; some migrate south in winter. Includes *M. m. ingersolli* McGregor, 1899 and *M. m. inexpectata* Riley, 1911 (**Riley song sparrow**; *inexpectata* is a common *lapsus*). Doubtfully distinct; intermediate between *morphna* and *montana* in appearance also and may be hybrid birds.
- *Melospiza melodia cleonensis* McGregor, 1899. SW Oregon west of Cascade Mountains south to NW California. Brownish-buffish, notably on the flanks; no gray on back; underside with somewhat diffuse chestnut streaks.



Taken near Anacortes, Washington in March, this individual is most likely *M. m. morphna*



Taken at Springfield, Oregon in early April, this photo probably shows *M. m. cleonensis* or a "phaea" hybrid

Cismontane California group

Small, well-marked and short-winged brownish forms. All resident, except occasional birds from upland

populations.

- *Melospiza melodia gouldii* Baird, 1858. Coastal central California, except San Francisco Bay. A very brown and clear-marked subspecies; buffish (not light gray) fringes of upper back. *M. m. santaecrucis* Grinnell, 1901 are hybrids with birds from southwards and Central Valley populations.
- *Melospiza melodia samuelis* (Baird, 1858), **San Pablo song sparrow**. N San Francisco Bay and San Pablo Bay saltmarshes. A small, tiny-billed subspecies with dirty olive upperpart background.
- *Melospiza melodia maxillaris* Grinnell, 1909, **Suisun song sparrow**. Suisun Bay marshes. Dark upperparts; brown with gray mantle edges; plump bill base.
- *Melospiza melodia pusillula* Ridgway, 1899, **Alameda song sparrow**. E San Francisco Bay saltmarshes. Yellowest subspecies, paler than *samuelis* and clear yellow hue below.
- *Melospiza melodia heermanni* Baird, 1858. Central coastal California and Central Valley south to N Baja California. Similar in color to *maxillaris* but medium-sized mainland subspecies. Some N-S variation with birds becoming blacker on backs, local populations once separated as *M. m. cooperi* Ridgway, 1899 and *M. m. mailliardi* Grinnell, 1911. The latter, occurring around Modesto, may be distinct.
- *Melospiza melodia graminea* Townsend, 1890. Described from Santa Barbara Island, California Channel Islands. A smaller, pale-gray version of *heermanni*. Originally called **Santa Barbara song sparrow**; birds from the Coronado Islands were described as *M. m. coronatorum* Grinnell and Daggett, 1903, those from San Miguel Island as *M. m. micronyx* Grinnell, 1928 and those from San Clemente, Santa Rosa and Anacapa Islands as *M. m. clementae* Townsend, 1890. Hybrid population with *heermanni* on Santa Cruz Island. Extirpated on Santa Barbara (and possibly San Clemente) by feral cats, c. 1967–1970.

Southwestern group

Small, pale, streaks rufous; all resident.

- *Melospiza melodia fallax* (Baird, 1854), **desert song sparrow**. Sonoran and parts of Mojave Deserts to E Arizona. A pale ruddy desert form. Synonyms are *M. m. saltonis* Grinnell, 1909, *M. m. virginis* Marshall and Behle, 1942 and *M. m. bendirei* Phillips, 1943.
- *Melospiza melodia rivularis* Bryant, 1888. Central Baja California. Similar to *fallax*, lightly streaked breast and long slender bill.
- *Melospiza melodia goldmani* Nelson, 1899. Not yet found outside El Salto area, Sierra Madre Oriental. Dark reddish brown back with brownish streaks just as in *morphna*.

Mexican Plateau group

Black-spotted, white throats; all resident.

- *Melospiza melodia adusta* Nelson, 1899. Río Lerma drainage from Zacapú to Lago Yuriria. Bold black pattern on belly and back, clear white throat. Birds become less ruddy brown going east.
- *Melospiza melodia villai* Phillips and Dickerman, 1957. Headwaters of Río Lerma near Toluca. Darker and duller brown than *adusta*, distinctly large.
- *Melospiza melodia mexicana* Ridgway, 1874. Hidalgo to Puebla. Duller and paler than *adusta*, birds

becoming grayish going south. Includes *M. m. azteca* Dickerman, 1963 and *M. m. niceae* Dickerman, 1963. "M. m. pectoralis" (*ex* von Müller, 1865) cannot be assigned to a known song sparrow population.

Conservation status

Seen as a whole, the song sparrow is widespread and common enough to be classified as Species of Least Concern by the IUCN. The taxa *mailliardi*, *maxillaris*, *samuelis* (all Category 3), *pusillula* (Category 2), and *graminea* (Category 1) are listed as **Species of Special Concern** in California.^[15]

References

- BirdLife International (2012). "*Melospiza melodia*" (<http://www.iucnredlist.org/details/22721058>). *IUCN Red List of Threatened Species. Version 2013.2*. International Union for Conservation of Nature. Retrieved 26 November 2013.
- eNature: Song Sparrow *Melospiza melodia* (<http://www.enature.com/fieldguides/detail.asp?allSpecies=y&searchText=Song%20Sparrow>)
- The Cornell lab of ornithology: Song Sparrow *Melospiza melodia* (http://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/Song_Sparrow/lifehistory)
- CRC Handbook of Avian Body Masses* by John B. Dunning Jr. (Editor). CRC Press (1992), ISBN 978-0849342585.
- Wasser, D. E.; Sherman, P. W. (2010). "Avian longevities and their interpretation under evolutionary theories of senescence". *Journal of Zoology* **280** (2): 103. doi:10.1111/j.1469-7998.2009.00671.x (<https://dx.doi.org/10.1111%2Fj.1469-7998.2009.00671.x>).
- Greenberg, R (1990). "Feeding neophobia and ecological plasticity: A test of the hypothesis with captive sparrows". *Animal Behaviour* **39** (2): 375–379. doi:10.1016/S0003-3472(05)80884-X (<https://dx.doi.org/10.1016%2FS0003-3472%2805%2980884-X>).
- Nice, Margaret M. and Ter Pelkwyk, Joost (1941). "Enemy Recognition by the Song Sparrow" (<http://sora.unm.edu/node/18148>). *The Auk* **58** (2): 195–214. doi:10.2307/4079104 (<https://dx.doi.org/10.2307%2F4079104>). JSTOR 4079104 (<https://www.jstor.org/stable/4079104>).
- Smith, James N. M.; Arcese, Peter; McLean, Ian G. (1984). "Age, experience, and enemy recognition by wild song sparrows". *Behavioral Ecology and Sociobiology* **14** (2): 101. doi:10.1007/BF00291901 (<https://dx.doi.org/10.1007%2FBF00291901>).
- Smith, James N. M. and Arcese, Peter (1994). "Brown-Headed Cowbirds and an Island Population of Song Sparrows: A 16-Year Study" (<http://sora.unm.edu/node/104919>). *The Condor* **96** (4): 916–934. doi:10.2307/1369102 (<https://dx.doi.org/10.2307%2F1369102>). JSTOR 1369102 (<https://www.jstor.org/stable/1369102>).
- Patten, M.A. (2001): The roles of habitat and signalling in speciation: evidence from a contact zone of two Song Sparrow (*Melospiza melodia*) subspecies. Ph.D. diss., Univ. of California, Riverside.
- Arcese, P.; Sogge, M.K.; Marr, A.B. & Patten, M.A. (2002): Song Sparrow (*Melospiza melodia*). In: Poole, A. & Gill, F.: *The Birds of North America* **704**. The Birds of North America, Inc., Philadelphia, PA.
- Hare, M.P. & Shields, G.F. (1992 (1992)). "Mitochondrial-DNA variation in the polytypic Alaskan song sparrow" (<http://sora.unm.edu/sites/default/files/journals/auk/v109n01/p0126-p0132.pdf>) (PDF). *Auk* **109** (1): 126–132. doi:10.2307/4088273 (<https://dx.doi.org/10.2307%2F4088273>).

13. Gabrielson, Ira N. & Lincoln, Frederick C. (1951 (1951)). "The Races of Song Sparrows in Alaska" (<http://sora.unm.edu/sites/default/files/journals/condor/v053n05/p0250-p0255.pdf>) (PDF). *Condor* **53** (5): 250–255. doi:10.2307/1364957 (<https://dx.doi.org/10.2307%2F1364957>).
14. Pruett, Christin; Gibson, Daniel D. & Winker, Kevin (2003 (2004)). "Amak Island Song Sparrows (*Melospiza melodia amaka*) are not evolutionarily significant" (http://www.jstage.jst.go.jp/article/osj/3/2/133/_pdf). *Ornithological Science* **3** (2): 133–138. doi:10.2326/osj.3.133 (<https://dx.doi.org/10.2326%2Fosj.3.133>).
15. California Department of Fish and Game (CDFG) (2006): California Bird Species of Special Concern.

Further reading

- Beecher, M.D.; Campbell, S.E. & Stoddard, P.K. (1994): Correlation of Song Learning and Territory Establishment Strategies in the Song Sparrow. *Proc. Natl. Acad. Sci. USA* **91**(4): 1450–1454. PDF fulltext (<http://www.pnas.org/cgi/reprint/91/4/1450.pdf>)
- Stoddard, Beecher, M.D.; Horning, C.L. & Campbell, S.E. (1991): Recognition of individual neighbors by song in the song sparrow, a species with song repertoires. *Behavioral Ecology and Sociobiology* **29**(3): 211–215.
- O'Loughlen, A.L. & Beecher; M.D. (1997): Sexual preferences for mate song types in female song sparrows. *Animal Behavior* **53**(4): 835–841. PDF fulltext (<http://faculty.washington.edu/beecher/O&B1-ab97.pdf>)
- Smith, J.N.M.*et al.* (1997): A metapopulation approach to the population biology of the Song Sparrow *Melospiza melodia*. *Ibis* 138:4, 120–128.

External links

- Song sparrow ID, including sound and video (http://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/song_sparrow/id), at Cornell Lab of Ornithology
- Song sparrow facts at BirdHouses101.com (<http://www.birdhouses101.com/song-sparrow.asp>)
- Song sparrow species account (http://www.birds.cornell.edu/AllAboutBirds/BirdGuide/Song_Sparrow.html) – Cornell Lab of Ornithology
- Song sparrow - *Melospiza melodia* (<http://www.mbr-pwrc.usgs.gov/id/framlst/i5810id.html>) - USGS Patuxent Bird Identification InfoCenter
- Song sparrow videos, photos, and sounds (<http://ibc.lynxeds.com/species/song-sparrow-melospiza-melodia>) at the Internet Bird Collection
- Song sparrow photo gallery (<http://vireo.acnatsci.org/search.html?Form=Search&SEARCHBY=Common&KEYWORDS=song+sparrow&showwhat=images&AGE=All&SEX=All&ACT=All&Search=Search&VIEW=All&ORIENTATION=All&RESULTS=24>) at VIREO (Drexel University)



Wikimedia Commons has media related to ***the song sparrow***.



Wikispecies has information related to: ***Melospiza melodia***

Retrieved from "http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Song_sparrow&oldid=656845331"

Categories: IUCN Red List least concern species | Melospiza | Animals described in 1810

| Birds of North America | Birds of Canada | Birds of the United States | Native birds of Alaska

| Birds of Mexico | Fauna of Northern Mexico | North American migratory birds

- This page was last modified on 17 April 2015, at 02:58.
- Text is available under the Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike License; additional terms may apply. By using this site, you agree to the Terms of Use and Privacy Policy. Wikipedia® is a registered trademark of the Wikimedia Foundation, Inc., a non-profit organization.