



SPARROWS

2011 Louisiana Bird Calendar

WHAT IS A SPARROW?

"Of Louisiana's 33 recorded sparrows, only seven species breed here..."



Greg Lavaty, Photographer (Vesper Sparrow)

"Fourteen species migrate through and/or overwinter here on a regular basis."



Greg Lavaty, Photographer (Lark Sparrow)

Generally, sparrows are characterized as small, gray or brown-streaked, conical-billed birds that live on or near the ground. The cryptic blend of gray, white, black, and brown hues that comprise a typical sparrow's color pattern are the result of tens of thousands of sparrow generations that lived in grassland and brushland habitats. The triangular or cone-shaped bills inherent to most all sparrow species are perfectly adapted for a life of granivory – of crushing and husking seeds.

Sparrows possess well-developed claws on their toes, the evolutionary result of so much time spent on the ground scratching for seeds through leaf litter and other duff. Additionally, most species incorporate a substantial amount of insect, spider, snail, and other invertebrate food items into their diets, especially during the spring and summer months.

New World sparrows belong to the bird family Emberizidae. Here in North America, sparrows are divided into 13 genera, which also include the towhees (genus *Pipilo*), longspurs (genus *Calcarius*), juncos (genus *Junco*), and Lark Bunting (genus *Calamospiza*) – all of which are technically sparrows. Emberizidae is a large family, containing well over 300 species worldwide, 50 of which occur in the United States on a regular basis and 33 of which have been recorded for Louisiana.

Of Louisiana's 33 recorded sparrows, only seven species breed here: Eastern Towhee, Bachman's Sparrow, Chipping Sparrow, Field Sparrow, Lark Sparrow, Grasshopper Sparrow, and Seaside Sparrow. Fourteen species migrate through and/or overwinter here on a regular basis: Clay-colored Sparrow, Vesper Sparrow,

Savannah Sparrow, Henslow's Sparrow, Le Conte's Sparrow, Nelson's Sparrow, Fox Sparrow, Song Sparrow, Lincoln's Sparrow, Swamp Sparrow, White-throated Sparrow, White-crowned Sparrow, Dark-eyed Junco, and Lapland Longspur.

Twelve additional species have been recorded here on rare/irregular occasions: Green-tailed Towhee, Spotted Towhee, Cassin's Sparrow, American Tree Sparrow, Brewer's Sparrow, Lark Bunting, Baird's Sparrow, Golden-crowned Sparrow, Harris's Sparrow, McCown's Longspur, Smith's Longspur, and Chestnut-collared Longspur. Of these, Spotted Towhee and Harris's Sparrow can very nearly be considered a regularly occurring species here, as several reports are filed from Louisiana each winter, most often involving birds that frequently remain in single locales for long periods.

Here, it is appropriate to note that the abundant and familiar House Sparrow (*Passer domesticus*) is actually a member of the "Weaver Finch" family (Ploceidae)—an Old World, non-native, exotic introduction into the United States—and is therefore not included within this group of native North American sparrows.

Due to their secretive habits and distressingly similar cryptic color patterns, sparrows are often overlooked or ignored by most people, including neophyte birders. Through an outstanding series of submitted photographs, many executed by local Louisiana birders, and a discussion generated from a number of excellent resources, it is hoped that this publication will shed well-deserved light upon Louisiana's substantial sparrow community.



David Cagnolatti, Photographer (Clay-colored Sparrow)



Greg Lavaty, Photographer (Field Sparrow)



Greg Lavaty, Photographer (Savannah Sparrow)

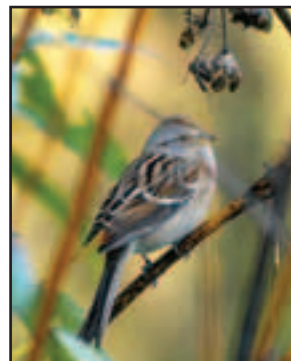
"Twelve additional species have been recorded here on rare/irregular occasions."



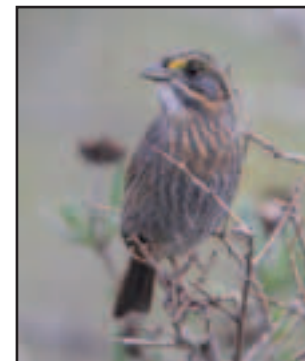
Gerrit Vyn, Photographer (Song Sparrow)



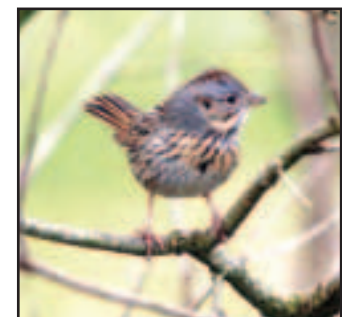
Greg Lavaty, Photographer (McCown's Longspur)



David Cagnolatti, Photographer (American Tree Sparrow)



Greg Lavaty, Photographer (Seaside Sparrow)



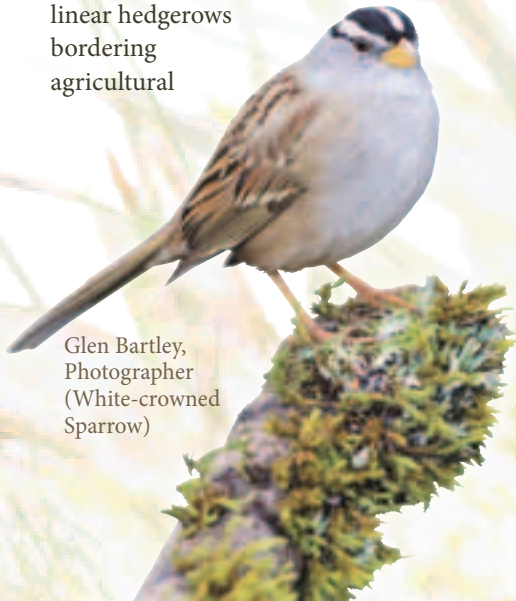
David Cagnolatti, Photographer (Lincoln's Sparrow)

SPARROWS IN LOUISIANA

The majority of New World sparrow species have adapted to lives spent in grassy and/or brushy habitats, of which there is no shortage in Louisiana. Woodlands, brushlands, woodland edges, agricultural fields and hedgerows, fallow fields, woody/grassy water edges, “pocket” meadows and prairies, and marshes are all in good supply in our state—and so are the sparrows that fill them at different times each year. Consider that nearly half (23 of 50) of native U.S./Canadian sparrow species either breed, overwinter, or otherwise spend varying amounts of time in Louisiana on an annual basis.

Field Sparrows and Fox Sparrows are dedicated brushland specialists, secreting themselves in very young, open-canopied forest habitats and also in older, climax-type shrub-scrub habitats. Such habitats include “old fields” of varying ages, pineland cutovers, back-beach thorn-scrub along the coast, and other natural settings that include large expanses of dense shrub and sapling tree thickets.

Similarly, overwintering Song, Lincoln’s, and White-crowned sparrows appreciate dense, brushy conditions and seem especially attracted to the more narrow, linear hedgerows bordering agricultural

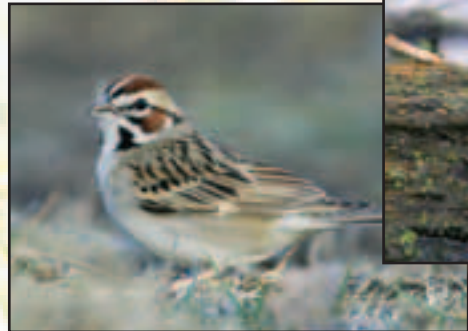


Glen Bartley, Photographer (White-crowned Sparrow)

fields. Hedgerows in Louisiana are commonly populated with small trees such as rough-leaf dogwood, elderberry, and prickly ash, rising just above dense colonial shrub thickets of blackberry, dewberry, American beautyberry, Japanese honeysuckle, and other shrubs and vines. White-crowned Sparrows are also dwellers of dense shrub thickets, and are often encountered in thickly overgrown fence rows.

A substantial number of Louisiana sparrows are grassland dwellers. Most common and ubiquitous during the winter months is the Savannah Sparrow, which readily occupies taller native and non-native grassy edges of agricultural fields and roadsides. Vesper Sparrows are often found near Savannah Sparrows but prefer to occupy adjacent areas of close-cropped grasses and very short agricultural stubble, such as pastures, and harvested fields. The harvested cotton fields of central and northern Louisiana, for example, are excellent locales in which to look for Vesper Sparrows. When disturbed, both of these species flush to the nearest woody vegetation (trees or brush) where they might momentarily intermingle.

All four of the longspur species recorded in Louisiana are short-grass dwellers, most often found



Brian Small, Photographer (Lark Sparrow)

in harvested agricultural fields, pastures, and short-mowed fields, including those around airports.

Our native Lark Sparrow is also fond of flat, open expanses of pastures and harvested fields, especially those adjacent to woodland edges. Because of its larger size, and often solitary winter nature, this species is sometimes overlooked by field observers around the much larger numbers of Savannah and other grassland sparrows.

“The majority of New World sparrow species have adapted to lives spent in grassy and/or brushy habitats, of which there is no shortage in Louisiana.”

Overwintering Swamp Sparrows, often found along the edges of hedgerows and brushlands, seem also fond of foraging in pure, 3-foot tall stands of broomsedge, a native grass species possessing fluffy, rust-colored seed heads during the winter months that grows commonly throughout most of Louisiana. Swamp Sparrows are also attracted to dense 2-foot tall expanses of harvested rice. During the winter



Greg Lavaty, Photographer (Swamp Sparrow)

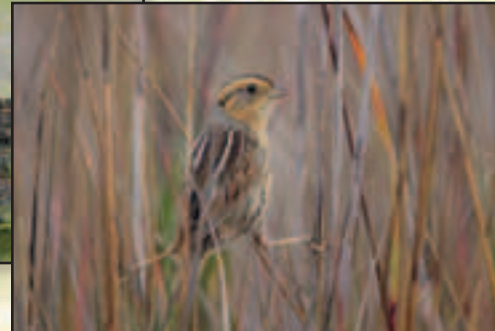
months, Swamp Sparrows are sure to be abundant in both of these habitat types, often along with the very secretive and cryptic Sedge Wren and other grassland sparrows such as the beautiful Le Conte’s Sparrow, albeit in far fewer numbers than that of the Swamp Sparrow.

Marsh habitats provide homes for several species, including our native Seaside Sparrow, which is most often found in salt-marsh habitats nearest to the Gulf of Mexico. The overwintering Nelson’s Sparrow seems most attracted

to freshwater cattail marsh pockets, including those embedded within intermediate and even salt-marshes within our coastal zone.

Brush piles, comprised of bulldozed trees and often overgrown with blackberry, honeysuckle and other thicket-forming shrubs and vines, have proven to be excellent places to search for some of our rarer sparrows, including Harris’s Sparrow, Golden-crowned Sparrow, Green-tailed Towhee, as well as other rarities such as Bewick’s Wren and Sage Thrasher.

Another interesting setting for uncommon sparrows includes the modified thorn-scrub thickets of huisache acacia along the back-beaches of our coastal parishes. These large thorny shrubs hold a surprisingly diverse



Greg Lavaty, Photographer (Nelson’s Sparrow)

variety of bird life, particularly during the spring, fall and winter months, including the uncommon but regularly occurring Grasshopper and Clay-colored sparrows.

Chipping Sparrows and Dark-eyed Juncos forage in very short vegetation or bare ground habitats, almost always along woodland edges, where foraging groups flush up at characteristically steep angles into nearby canopy trees when disturbed. Both “Chippies” and Dark-eyed Juncos are also popular backyard seed-feeder birds.

Only a few sparrow species live in closed-canopied forests in our state. The Eastern Towhee nests exclusively under mature forest canopies, especially those possessing dense understories of shrub thickets. The habitat of Bachman’s Sparrow, another year-round resident species here in Louisiana, is almost completely limited to the thin, shrubby understory scattered beneath mature pine forests, especially the longleaf pine savannahs of the Florida parishes and west-central Louisiana. Overwintering Henslow’s Sparrows appreciate the thick, short-grass forest floors of these same pineland savannahs, particularly the wetter locations.

The White-throated Sparrow, one of the most abundant of our winter-visiting sparrow species, also prefers the shady, understory thickets and edges of almost any forest, including urban forests, bottomland hardwoods, mixed pine-hardwood, and pure pine habitats.



Greg Lavaty, Photographer (Song Sparrow)

SPARROWS IN LOUISIANA



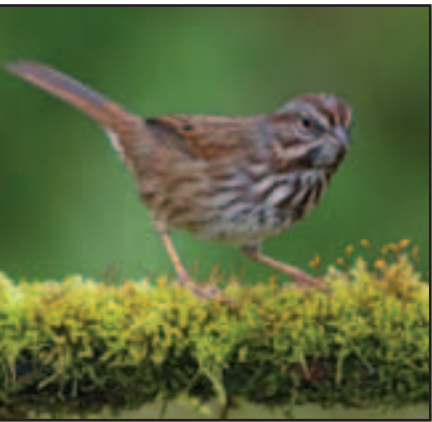
David Cagnolatti, Photographer
(White-throated Sparrow)

White-throated Sparrow is by far the most abundant of the “backyard seed-feeder” sparrows throughout the state.

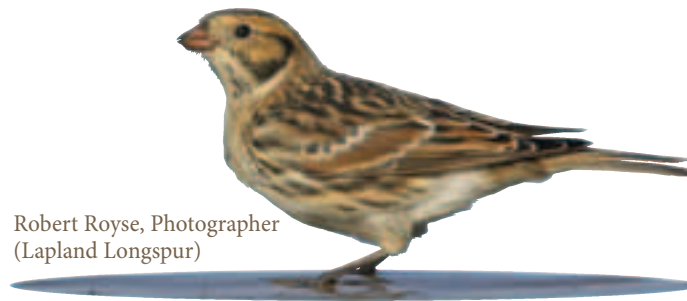
Most all sparrow species are ground-gleaning foragers, hopping or walking over bare or vegetation-covered ground, scratching and pecking for seeds, insects, and other invertebrate organisms. Some sparrows also habitually alight upon the standing seed heads of selected wildflower and weed species to pluck seeds directly from the plant’s seed heads. One “Louisiana” example of such behavior includes White-throated Sparrows alighting and “riding-down” the seed heads of ironweed, plucking at the seed heads as they descend. Another is Swamp Sparrows alighting on the stalks of goldenrod for the same purpose.

During the winter months, a substantial number of sparrow species have also been observed to take fleshy fruits, especially

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Glen Bartley, Photographer
(Song Sparrow)



Robert Royse, Photographer
(Lapland Longspur)

those of vines such as poison ivy, honeysuckle, and Virginia creeper and shrubs and trees such as American beautyberry, yaupon holly, and hackberry. In Louisiana, Eastern Towhee, Spotted Towhee, Fox Sparrow, White-throated Sparrow, White-crowned Sparrow, and Dark-eyed Junco have all been reported to engage in such frugivorous behavior.

Biologists Paul R. Ehrlich, D. S. Dobkin, and D. Wheye, authors of *The Birder’s Handbook 1988*, mention that like the Killdeer, most nesting sparrows – including towhees and longspurs – exhibit distraction displays when disturbed, feigning a broken wing or leg as they limp or weakly flutter, leading potential predators away from their nests. These authors also mention an interesting brooding behavior exhibited by numerous sparrow species whereby care for individual brood members is split evenly by the adult male and female.



Greg Lavaty, Photographer (Dark-eyed Junco)



Greg Lavaty, Photographer
(Lincoln’s Sparrow)

IDENTIFYING SPARROWS IN THE FIELD

Because birds are so active and mobile, many if not most of the different groups (waterfowl, raptors, shorebirds, gulls and terns, flycatchers, warblers, etc.) present their share of identification challenges. In this regard, sparrows are no different. The combination of their small size, secretive habits, numerous species, and cryptic color

patterns has rightfully earned them the collective nickname “LBJ” – “little brown jobs” – by less experienced birders.

The best way to begin learning sparrows is to study those species that most commonly visit your seed feeders during the winter months, such as White-throated and

Chipping sparrows. Just about anywhere in Louisiana, the constant presence of these two species at millet seed feeders should provide ample opportunity to get acquainted with sparrow field marks. Begin by learning to observe the presence or absence of coarser, more easily viewable field marks such as breast and side

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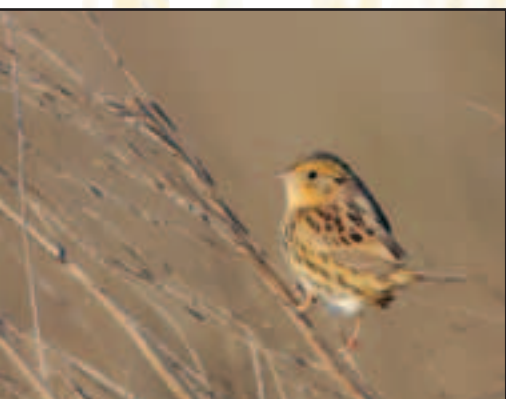


Greg Lavaty,
Photographer
(Chipping Sparrow)



Greg Lavaty, Photographer
(Spotted Towhee)

"Begin by learning to observe the presence or absence of coarser, more easily viewable field marks such as breast and side streaking and wingbars. Then, gradually hone in on finer details such as the presence or absence of eye rings, eyebrows (supercillia), eye lines (dark line running through the eye), and 'moustachial' (malar) marks."



Greg Lavaty, Photographer (Le Conte's Sparrow)



Former Governor Foster, Bobby Santini and other birders enjoy Louisiana's bounty. Dennis Demcheck, Photographer

streaking and wingbars. Then, gradually hone in on finer details such as the presence or absence of eye rings, eyebrows (supercillia), eye lines (dark line running through the eye), and "moustachial" (malar) marks.

Does the bird that you are studying possess a pair of white wingbars? If it does, consider that of the 18 regularly occurring sparrow species in Louisiana, only four or five of them possess overt, "bright" white wingbars. Thus, the presence of wingbars on a subject sparrow immediately narrows down the identification possibilities by nearly 75%. Similarly, 10 of the 18 common sparrow species in Louisiana possess streaked sides and/or breasts. Thus, noting the presence or absence of ventral streaking on your subject bird can immediately narrow down the range of possibilities by 50%.

Most sparrows possess lots of brown, gray, and cream-colored markings, along

with more occasional bits of buff, black, and rufous markings. Simply learning which species possess which of the latter group of markings, and where on their bodies each species possesses them, is a very effective way of identifying sparrows down to species level.

For example, rufous coloration (a red-brown hue that also includes "bright chestnut" and "rust" tone) in Louisiana's regularly occurring sparrow species is limited to the wings only on but five species: Swamp, Lincoln's, White-throated, Nelson's Sharp-tailed, and Seaside sparrows. Likewise, buff hues located on the facial regions only are limited mostly to the Clay-colored, Chipping (young birds), Lincoln's, Grasshopper, Le Conte's, Henslow's, and Nelson's Sharp-tailed sparrows. Thus, if even a portion of a sparrow's body is well-viewed, chances for field identification can rise substantially.

Unfortunately, most grassland species, such as the Savannah Sparrow, and birds from the sparrow genera *Ammodramus* and *Calcarius* do not often visit seed feeders. For those birds, observers must walk or slowly drive (windows down) along appropriate habitats, ears and eyes attuned for sparrow sounds and movements.

These are but a few tips in learning to identify sparrows in the field. The most important point to remember is that regardless of how avid of a field guide reader you are, there is no substitute for the actual practice of viewing birds through magnification. Whether from the comfortable confines of your own kitchen table, or out in the field, use your optics as often as possible, over and over, moving from bird to bird. After hours of visual study and mental notes, comparisons and contrasts with adjacent known species, and then field guide study, you'll learn sparrows in the same way that you learned other birds – one species at a time.

"The most important point to remember is... there is no substitute for the actual practice of viewing birds through magnification. Whether from the comfortable confines of your own kitchen table, or out in the field, use your optics as often as possible, over and over, moving from bird to bird."



Alan Murphy, Photographer (Lincoln's Sparrow)



Cindy Skopp, Photographer

LOUISIANA'S 2011 BIRD WATCHING DATES TO REMEMBER

EAGLE EXPO 2011	February 11 - 12, 2011, Morgan City	Contact info 985-395-4905
THE GREAT LOUISIANA BIRDFEST	April 15 - 17, 2011, Mandeville	Contact info 985-626-1238
GRAND ISLE MIGRATORY BIRD CELEBRATION	April 15 - 17, 2011, Grand Isle	Contact info 800-259-0869
WADERS IN WORKING WETLANDS: SHOREBIRD EXTRAVAGANZA	April 28 - May 1, 2011, Southwest LA	Contact info 225-642-5763
NEOTROPICAL SONGBIRD TOUR (ATCHAFALAYA BASIN)	May 14, 2011 Sherburne Wildlife Management Area	Contact info 318-793-5529
WOOD STORK DAY	July 16, 2011 Sherburne Wildlife Management Area	Contact info 337-948-0255
LOUISIANA HUMMINGBIRD CELEBRATION	July 29 - 30, 2011, St. Francisville	Contact info 800-488-6502
FOLSOM HUMMINGBIRD FESTIVAL	September 10, 2011, Folsom	Contact info 985-796-9309
YELLOW RAILS & RICE FESTIVAL 2011	November 3 - 6, 2011, Jennings	Contact info 225-642-5763


For more information about these events, please visit [HTTP://BIRDLouisiana.com](http://birdlouisiana.com)



White-throated Sparrow Photographed by: Gerrit Vyn

JANUARY 2011

WHITE-THROATED SPARROW

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
						1 NEW YEAR'S DAY
2	3	4	5	6	7	8
9	10 <i>Swamp Sparrows reach peak density in coastal Louisiana</i>	11	12	13	14	15
16	17 MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR.'S BIRTHDAY	18-22 <i>Listen for the mournful song of the White-throated Sparrow on warm days</i>				
23	24	25 <i>Louisiana's first Harris Sparrow recorded in LaSalle Parish, 1916</i>	26	27 <i>McCown's Longspur observed in Jeff Davis Parish, 1991</i>	28	29
30	31	30-31 <i>Look for Henslow's Sparrow in wet, grassy, pineland savannahs</i>				

Between November and April each year, the most commonly encountered sparrow in Louisiana is the White-throated Sparrow. Each winter, hordes of this far-north breeding species descend into the woodlands and shrub-scrublands of the United States, filling these habitats with their frequently uttered, musical, "tseet!" call notes. On warmer, sunny days, wintering males will even break out into their forlornly whistled "old sam pea-body" territorial breeding song, which, according to ornithologist Harry Oberholser, author of *The Bird Life of Louisiana 1938*, earned them the nickname "Peabody Bird."

In Louisiana, White-throated Sparrows fill seemingly every woodland niche available: mixed and pure pine forests, upland and bottomland hardwood forests, shrubby cutovers and "old field" sites and agricultural hedgerows, all the way down to the thorn-scrub thickets and cheniere forests of our coastal zone.

Interestingly, two color forms of the White-throated Sparrow exist. The first, the "bright" form, possesses a pure white central crown stripe, supercillia ("eyebrows"), and chin/throat, punctuated by a bold, golden-yellow spot at the corner of the eye. The second type is the "dull" form, possessing a dull white throat, buff-tan central crown stripe, and supercillia, resulting in a duller, less contrasting appearance. Both forms also possess reddish wings, black/brown/gray streaked backs, and clear gray breasts, which contrast strongly against their pure white throats.

Neither age nor sex have any bearing on which birds attain dull versus bright plumage. Careful White-throated Sparrow observers conclude that the bright form apparently dominates the dull form in most all behavioral activities. Interestingly, it also appears that in breeding situations, mixed dull-bright pairs are far more common than dull-dull or bright-bright pairs.

In *The Bird Life of Louisiana 1938*, ornithologist Harry Oberholser wrote, "The food of this bird consists of seeds of weeds and of grasses, a very little grain, most of it waste, and some berries, such as those of poison ivy, smilax [greenbriar], wild cherry, blueberry, dogwood, and blackberry. In its animal food it is notably beneficial, since it consumes a great many injurious insects such as beetles, grasshoppers, locusts, ants, the bollweevil, and other weevils."

The White-throated Sparrow has been reported as abundant as far back as European settlement began in the United States and remains so today.

In *Sparrows of the U.S. and Canada 1996*, author James Rising provides this quote by John James Audubon: "It is a plump bird, fattening almost to excess, whilst in Louisiana, and affords delicious eating, for which purpose many are killed with blow-guns."



Swamp Sparrow Photographed by: David Chauvin

FEBRUARY 2011

SWAMP SPARROW

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
		1 <i>Smith's Longspur observed in Caddo Parish, 1992</i>	2	3	4	5
6	7	8	9	10	11 <i>EAGLE EXPO 2011 Morgan City, Contact info 985-395-4905</i>	12
13	14 <i>Most Lapland Longspurs depart for northern breeding grounds</i>	15	16	17	18	19
20 <i>Many overwintering sparrow species become more vocal and on the move</i>	21 PRESIDENT'S DAY	22	23	24	25 <i>Lark Sparrows begin courtship activities in Louisiana</i>	26
27	28 <i>Most Dark-eyed Juncos depart for northern breeding grounds</i>					

After the White-throated and Savannah sparrows, the Swamp Sparrow is one of the most commonly encountered winter sparrow species in Louisiana, where it tends to reside in small flocks around wet, brushy and/or grassy habitats such as densely vegetated irrigation canals, damp broomsedge fields, the edges of bottomland hardwood forests, and marshlands throughout the state.

Breeding throughout most of central and eastern Canada, and the Great Lakes and northeastern regions of the United States, the Swamp Sparrow commonly winters through the Ohio River Valley and the southeastern part of the country, and more sparsely so in the southern Great Plains, and in the eastern half of Texas down into central Mexico.

Shy and retiring, the Swamp Sparrow is rather easily flushed but then drops back quickly into dense vegetation via short, weak bursts of flight accompanied by loose-jointed wagging of its tail, similar to that of its larger, longer-tailed cousin the Song Sparrow. More often than not, the Swamp Sparrow is detected by its trademark metallic "chink!" call note, similar to that of both the Song Sparrow and the White-throated Sparrow, though not nearly as melodious as the latter two. During the winter months in Louisiana, especially in the early morning and late evening hours, certain damp, grassy fields come alive with dozens of calling Swamp Sparrows.

According to North American sparrow expert James D. Rising (*Sparrows of the United States and Canada, 1996*), the Swamp Sparrow was originally called the "reed sparrow" by 18th century American naturalist William Bartram, until it was officially described and renamed in 1790 by the British ornithologist John Latham, based on a specimen sent to him from Georgia.





Henslow's Sparrow Photographed by: Brian Small

MARCH 2011

HENSLOW'S SPARROW

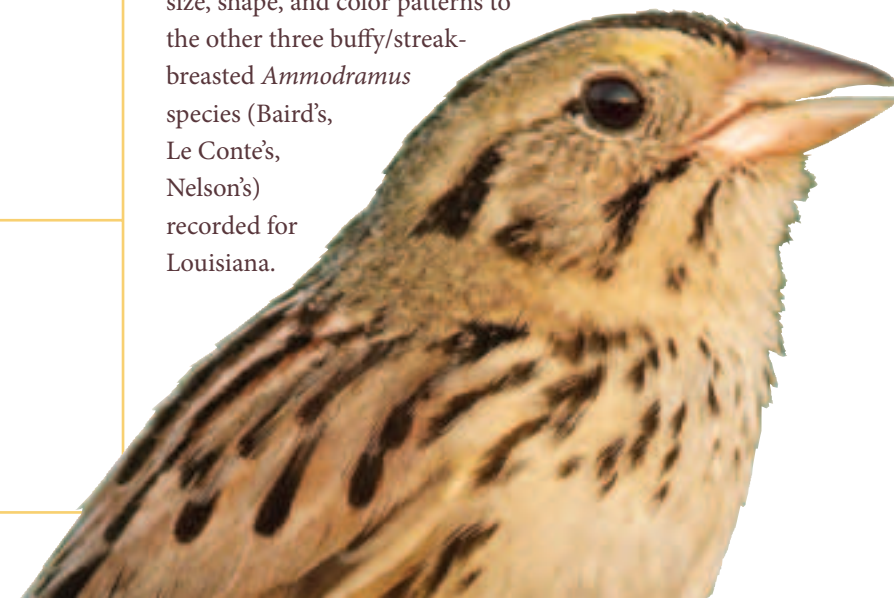
SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
		1	2	3	4	5
6	7	8 MARDI GRAS	9	10	11	12
13 <i>Eastern Towhees begin singing in bottomland hardwood forests</i>	14 <i>Seaside Sparrows begin courtship activities in coastal salt-marshes</i>	15	16 <i>Nelson's Sparrows depart for northern breeding grounds</i>	17	18	19
20	21 <i>Fox Sparrows depart for northern breeding grounds</i>	22	23 <i>Louisiana's first Chestnut-collared Longspur recorded in Caddo Parish</i>	24	25	26
27	28	29	30	31		

Discovered by Audubon in 1820 and named after his friend (and mentor of Charles Darwin), the English botanist John Stevens Henslow, Henslow's Sparrow is presently experiencing dramatic population declines within parts of its range and has been declared a "species of highest priority" by the international bird conservation agency, Partners in Flight. Additionally, it has been categorized as "threatened or endangered" in 12 states and noted as a "species of special concern" in four more.

According to a number of sources, Henslow's Sparrow was once a marshland specialist along the Atlantic Coast but has severely declined in that habitat in recent years. Today, it is mostly found breeding in tallgrass prairies and wet tallgrass meadows from the upper Midwest eastward through the Great Lakes region, southern Ontario, and New England.

In Louisiana, Henslow's Sparrow occurs as an uncommon to rare and local winter species. Although it is occasionally detected from a variety of grassy areas throughout the state, it is most often recorded from the moist, grassy forest floors of restored long-leaf pine savannah habitats in the west-central and Florida parishes.

Of the *Ammodramus* sparrow species, Henslow's Sparrow is the only one possessing a clearly demarked face suffused with olive-green coloration. Otherwise, it is very similar in size, shape, and color patterns to the other three buffy/streak-breasted *Ammodramus* species (Baird's, Le Conte's, Nelson's) recorded for Louisiana.





Eastern Towhee Photographed by: Robert Royse

APRIL 2011

EASTERN TOWHEE

Here in Louisiana, the Eastern Towhee is a fairly common and widely distributed year-round species, breeding in the more dense understory shrub thickets of many forested habitats in nearly every parish. As recently as the mid-1970s, Eastern Towhee nesting in Louisiana was mostly confined to the Florida parishes; and, according to George Lowery, Jr. (*Louisiana Birds, 1974*), “would seem to have occupied the southeastern corner of the state as a breeding bird quite recently, at least in the last hundred years, for John James Audubon failed to find it nesting in the vicinity of either St. Francisville or New Orleans – places where he spent a great deal of time. . .”

Most U.S. sparrows average about 6 inches in length. At 8.5 inches, the Eastern Towhee is notably larger. While lacking the intricate streaking pattern of most other sparrows, the Eastern Towhee is nonetheless dramatically tri-colored, with solid black upperparts, bright rust sides, and pure white underparts and outer tail feathers. Females are similarly patterned, except with dark brown upperparts.

Notoriously shy, the Eastern Towhee is fairly easily detected even when concealed in dense brush, owing to its clear, loud vocalizations. The male’s breeding song is a short but beautiful series of whistled trills, phonetically translated by birders as “drink your teeeee,” which it sings throughout the day and often into the night during spring and summer breeding seasons. Its call, uttered with some frequency on a year-round basis, translates to “chee-Wink!” or “jor-EE!”

The Spotted Towhee (*Pipilo maculatus*), a close cousin to the Eastern Towhee, can be considered its western U.S. counterpart, differing in appearance only by the presence of bright white spots on its black mantle and wing coverts. Otherwise, the two species are remarkably similar and have indeed been lumped into one species at different points in new world ornithological history.

Most winters, several Spotted Towhees are recorded in Louisiana in the same dense, shrubby, forested habitats as those favored by the Eastern Towhee. Fortunately, the call of the Spotted Towhee differs enough from that of the Eastern Towhee, resulting in fairly easy separation of the two. In Louisiana, winter Spotted Towhee detections are scattered nearly statewide, but with the most occurring in the northwestern corner.

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
					1	2
3	4	5	6	7	8	9
	Northbound migrating Lincoln's Sparrows crowd into the coastal grasslands			Field Sparrows begin nesting		
10	11	12	13	14	15	16
Vesper Sparrows depart for northern breeding grounds					THE GREAT LOUISIANA Mandeville, Contact info 985-626-1238	
					GRAND ISLE MIGRATORY BIRD Grand Isle, Contact info: 800-259-0869	
17	18	19	20	21	22	23
BIRDFEST						
CELEBRATION						
24	25	26	27	28	29	30
EASTER	Bachman's Sparrows begin nesting			WADERS IN WORKING WETLANDS: SHOREBIRD EXTRAVAGANZA Southwest LA, Contact info 225-642-5763		
		Louisiana's only Baird's Sparrow recorded west of Rutherford Beach, 2003			Eastern Towhees begin courtship activities in Louisiana	



Bachman's Sparrow Photographed by: Brian Small

MAY 2011

BACHMAN'S SPARROW

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
1 WADERS IN WORKING WETLANDS CONTINUES	2 Le Conte's Sparrows depart for northern breeding grounds	3	4 Most Swamp Sparrows have left the state	5	6	7
8 Clay-colored Sparrows filter northward MOTHER'S DAY	9	10 Louisiana's only Cassin's Sparrow found north of Shreveport, 2008	11 White-crowned Sparrows depart for northern breeding grounds	12	13	14 NEOTROPICAL SONGBIRD TOUR Sherburne Wildlife Management Area Contact info 318-448-2404
15 The last Henslow's Sparrows depart for northern breeding grounds	16	17 The last of the White-throated Sparrows depart Louisiana	18	19	20	21
22	23	24	25	26	27	28
29	30 MEMORIAL DAY	31				

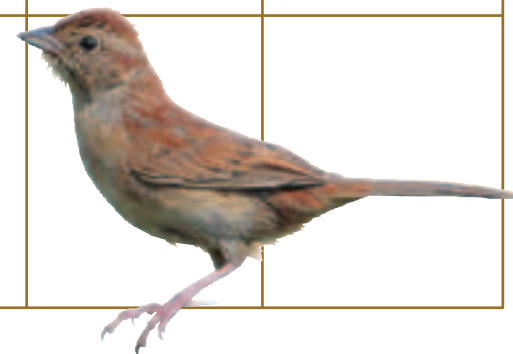
The only *Aimophila* native to the eastern half of the United States is Bachman's Sparrow, a pine woodland species restricted in range to southeastern North America (including east Texas). Here in Louisiana, Bachman's Sparrow favors mature pine forests sparsely dotted with small trees and shrubs on a grassy floor. Exceedingly shy, Bachman's Sparrows are rarely seen by birders. Those wishing to add it onto their "life lists" usually wait until the spring breeding season, when males ascend into the branches of low trees for bouts of territorial singing.

Like the Eastern Towhee, the song of Bachman's Sparrow is a loud, clear mix of whistles and trills but is quite variable in both tempo and pitch. D. A. Sibley (*The Sibley Guide to Birds, 2000*) describes a typical phrase as "feeeee-trrr, soo-treee..." Sibley also notes, "When flushed may give piercing, sharp 'tsees,' and, '...when agitated an extremely high-pitched 'tsisisisisi'."

Bachman's Sparrow possesses a somewhat subtle color pattern, with dingy/gray sides and upperparts vaguely streaked with dull, dark-brownish and reddish-brown hues. Its gray face is bisected by a dark-brown eyeline and topped with a chestnut-brown cap. The breast and sides of adults are suffused with tawny-buff. Three subspecies are recognized throughout Bachman's Sparrow's southeastern U.S. range. The plumage of the subspecies breeding in Louisiana (*A. aestivalis illinoensis*) possesses the brightest rufous-brown overtones on the upperparts, and the least amount of streaking, resulting in an almost thrush-like appearance.

The U.S. population of Bachman's Sparrow has been experiencing a long, gradual decline, generally corresponding to a decline in mature, open pine forests, especially long-leaf pine savannahs, also the preferred habitat of the federally endangered Red-cockaded Woodpecker. Long-leaf pine forest restorations meant to benefit that species have benefitted Bachman's Sparrow as well.

In Louisiana, nesting Bachman's Sparrows are reported primarily from the more mature pine forests of the eastern Florida parishes and west-central portions of the state. Fortunately, quite a bit of long-leaf pine savannah forest restoration is presently occurring in the Kisatchie National Forest and selected holdings managed by other agencies, including the Nature Conservancy.





Chipping Sparrow Photographed by: Glenn Bartley

JUNE 2011

CHIPPING SPARROW

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
			1	2	3	4
5	6	7	8	9	10	11
				Grasshopper Sparrows singing territorial songs in northwest Louisiana		
12	13	14	15	16	17	18
				Last of the Savannah Sparrows depart Louisiana for northern breeding grounds		
19	20	21	22	23	24	25
FATHER'S DAY					Look for fledgling Seaside Sparrows in coastal salt-marshes	
26	27	28	29	30		

Common throughout much of our state during the winter months, the Louisiana breeding range of the Chipping Sparrow (*Spizella passerina*) contracts into the pine forests of western, central, northern, and Florida parishes of Louisiana. Unlike most sparrow species, Chipping Sparrows nest high in the branches of pines, occupying a breeding niche similar to that of the much more numerous Pine Warbler. Interestingly, the trilling breeding songs of the males of these two species are remarkably similar, with that of the Chipping Sparrow being a bit less musical – more of a dry, rattling trill.

Like most all of the *Spizella* species, the Chipping Sparrow is slim and “athletic,” possessing a strong, explosive, and agile flight style, especially when disturbed.

Adult Chipping Sparrows in breeding plumage are among the easiest of the sparrow species to identify, possessing solid, nearly brick-red caps and pure white supercillia (“eyebrows”), malar areas, and wingbars. A strong, dark eyeline runs through the entire face, neatly separating the eyebrow from the nape and cheek. Otherwise, much of the Chipping Sparrow’s body is of a clear, unstreaked, ashy to medium-gray color. In strong contrast, its mantle and wings are rather heavily streaked with black and chestnut-brown (buff-brown in young birds).

Unlike most sparrow species, the Chipping Sparrow lives throughout both the eastern and western halves of the United States and Canada, migrating southward into the southwestern and southeastern regions of the country and much of Mexico during the fall and winter months. Louisiana’s rather meager population of breeding Chipping Sparrows is greatly augmented by northern migrants each winter – so much so that this species becomes one of our more common backyard feeder birds.

Jim Rising (*The Sparrows of the United States and Canada, 1996*) mentions, “In 1810, when the American Ornithologist Alexander Wilson named the Chipping Sparrow, he called it *Fringilla socialis*, the social sparrow, a fitting name for this little sparrow which is easily approached and often closely associated with human habitations.”

Throughout its wintering grounds, the Chipping Sparrow often forms small flocks of 10-30 birds, scouring short grass and bare ground areas of open forests and roadsides for seeds. When flushed, these flocks erupt in a characteristically strong, steep-angled escape flight, landing high up into the branches of the nearest trees.



Seaside Sparrow Photographed by: Greg Lavaty

JULY 2011

SEASIDE SPARROW

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
					1	2
3	4 INDEPENDENCE DAY	5	6	7 Louisiana's first modern-day Grasshopper Sparrow nest discovered in Bossier Parish, 1968	8	9
10	11 Chestnut-collared Longspur observed in Cameron Parish, 1993	12	13	14	15	16 WOOD STORK DAY Sherburne Wildlife Management Area Contact info 337-948-0255
17	18	19	20 Post-breeding Field and Chipping sparrows moving around in north Louisiana	21	22	23
24	25	26	27	28	29 FLUCIANA HUMMINGBIRD CELEBRATION St. Francisville, Contact info 800-488-6502	30
31						

At 6 inches total length, the Seaside Sparrow is the largest and longest-billed species of the *Ammodramus* sparrows. Confined exclusively to salt-marsh habitat, this species breeds throughout most of the Atlantic and Gulf coastlines of the United States, including most of coastal Louisiana.

The Gulf Coast race of Seaside Sparrow possesses a very dark, charcoal-gray body color, heavily marked above and below with wide, blackish streaking. Like many of the *Ammodramus* species, its wing coverts are edged with relatively bright rufous coloration, and it also possesses telltale, bright-yellowish lores (area between the base of the bill and the front of the eye) and a pure white throat. Its long, blackish bill is less conical in shape than in most other sparrow species. Rarely studied in the field, the Seaside Sparrow's feet are proportionately large and very useful in running (it only rarely flies) across soft mud. Thus, with its elongated bill and large feet, the Seaside Sparrow structurally and behaviorally recalls a small rail as it deliberately stalks prey items across the boggy ground and through dense curtains of marsh grasses.

This shy species is most often found in tidal situations where salt-water alternately floods and then retreats from the ground below. In coastal Louisiana, the Seaside Sparrow is a remotely distributed species requiring a bit of diligence – or better, just plain luck – in order to observe it. Fortunately, upon flushing it will often fly a very short distance and sit up atop foliage of smooth cordgrass for a short time before descending into the grass. However, it generally prefers running to flying when disturbed.



Louisiana ornithologist George Lowery, Jr. (*Louisiana Birds*, 1974), regarded the Seaside Sparrow as “an abundant permanent resident, mainly in densely matted and usually sharp-pointed grass and sedges that line our shores in places where the ground just back of the beach is flooded at high tide. Here they run about on the ground, or on masses of debris washed up by the waves, and would escape detection if we did not know that by making a squeaking noise we can cause them to mount the taller stalks of grass and even fly toward us from every direction.”



Field Sparrow Photographed by: Axel Hildebrandt

AUGUST 2011

FIELD SPARROW

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
	1	2	3	4	5	6
7	8	9	10	11	12	13
14	15	16	17	18	19	20
Look for early-arriving Vesper Sparrows in north Louisiana agricultural fields						Post-breeding Lark Sparrows becoming more common
21	22	23	24	25	26	27
			Chestnut-collared Longspur collected on South Marsh Island oil platform, 1998			
28	29	30	31			

Like the Chipping Sparrow, the Field Sparrow is another relatively sparse breeder from the genus *Spizella* in Louisiana, again favoring the pine forests of the Florida parishes and the northwestern and western portions of the state. As with the Chipping Sparrow, our native Field Sparrow population is greatly augmented by the arrival of northern migrants each winter, making it a fairly common bird statewide, particularly within its favored brushland and fallow field habitats.

Also like the Chipping Sparrow, the Field Sparrow is a notably thin and agile bird, exhibiting swift flight.

Though possessing the same “clean” well-demarcated color pattern (clear gray body with contrasting heavily streaked mantle and wings) of the Chipping Sparrow, the Field Sparrow is easily distinguished due to the presence of a fairly bright pink bill and thin but bright white eyerings – both of which fairly “glow” from behind the curtain of thin shrub branches to which they are almost always associated.

Unlike the more arboreal Chipping Sparrow, the Field Sparrow nests on or near the ground, most often in dense thickets of brush, saplings, and/or blackberry and honeysuckle. Throughout the nesting season, males sing their combination whistle-trill breeding songs from the tops of these thickets.

The song is unique in that it gradually accelerates from deliberate, individually whistled notes into a rapidly uttered, ascending trill, recalling that of a canary species. Moreover, George Lowery, Jr. (*Louisiana Birds*, 1974), writes, “The song of the Field Sparrow is a highly pleasing but somewhat plaintive whistle of two or three notes ending in a trill.”

The Field Sparrow is a bird of the eastern half of the United States, breeding and wintering almost exclusively within that region. Field Sparrows occupy a downright strange breeding range, which begins in New England, swings westward through the Midwest, then circles back southward and eastward through the eastern half of Texas before terminating in Louisiana. Birds winter as far north as Pennsylvania, Ohio, and Illinois, southward through the entire Gulf Coast, and westward through the Trans Pecos of Texas.



Nelson's Sparrow Photographed by: Greg Lavaty

SEPTEMBER 2011

NELSON'S SPARROW

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
				1	2	3
4 <i>Louisiana's first Lark Bunting recorded on roadside near Grand Isle, 1952</i>	5 LABOR DAY	6	7	8	9	10 FOLSOM HUMMINGBIRD FESTIVAL <i>Folsom, Contact info 985-796-9309</i>
11 <i>White-throated Sparrows arrive</i>	12	13	14	15	16	17
18 <i>Savannah Sparrows begin filtering into Louisiana</i>	19	20	21	22	23	24
25 <i>Look for migrating Nelson's Sparrows around inland cattail marshes</i>	26	27	28	29 <i>Swamp Sparrows arrive</i>	30	

Along with the Saltmarsh Sharp-tailed Sparrow and the Seaside Sparrow, Nelson's Sparrow is a dedicated marsh dweller. It is occasionally found away from marsh habitat in migration, but even during migration it most often settles into whatever bits of marsh it can find, especially freshwater cattail marshlands.

Breeding primarily in Canada (each year, the relatively few U.S. breeding records come from North Dakota and extreme northwestern Minnesota), Nelson's Sparrow winters on the Atlantic and Gulf Coasts of the United States. In Louisiana, wintering Nelson's Sparrows are mostly confined to the coastal marshes, although a few migratory individuals are recorded inland – most often around cattail marsh pockets at the edges of inland lakes or freshwater marshes.

Because of its propensity to inhabit often inaccessible marshlands, there are far fewer Nelson's Sparrow records generated during Louisiana winters compared to the other regularly occurring *Ammodramus* species. Nevertheless, Lowery (*Louisiana Birds, 1974*) regarded it as a common winter species here, whereas 36 years earlier, Oberholser (*The Bird Life of Louisiana, 1938*) characterized it as “a rare winter resident.”

Compared to the other streaked *Ammodramus* sparrow species, Nelson's Sparrow possesses more vague, blurry streaks on its underparts. Its breast, sides and face are well-suffused with bright ochraceous-buff, which contrasts beautifully with its medium-gray, unmarked nape, neck, and cheek patch.





Savannah Sparrow Photographed by: Charlie Hohorst

OCTOBER 2011

SAVANNAH SPARROW

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
						1
2	3	4	5	6	7 <i>Lincoln Sparrows arrive</i>	8
9	10 <i>Song Sparrows arrive</i> COLUMBUS DAY	11	12	13	14	15 <i>Dark-eyed Juncos arrive</i>
16	17	18	19 <i>White-crowned Sparrows arrive</i>	20	21	22
23	24	25 <i>Louisiana's first "Gray-headed" Junco recorded in Cameron Parish, 1997</i>	26	27	28 <i>Southbound Clay-colored Sparrows stop over in acacia thickets on coast</i>	29
30	31 HALLOWEEN					

Along with the White-throated Sparrow, the Savannah Sparrow is among the most abundant and ubiquitously distributed winter sparrow species in Louisiana. In contrast to the forest-loving White-throated Sparrow, the Savannah Sparrow is a grassland bird and most commonly occurs in and around agricultural fields and marshlands, both of which are in good supply in Louisiana.

The great 19th century U.S. ornithologist Alexander Wilson initially named the Savannah Sparrow *Fringilla savanna*, after Savannah, Georgia, from which the initial specimen apparently came. *Fringilla* was eventually replaced by *Passerculus*, but 'Savannah' stuck, now as the common name of this species.

The breeding range of the Savannah Sparrow is truly massive, encompassing nearly all of Canada, Alaska, the northern continental United States, the Appalachian Mountains, the U.S. Pacific coast, and the mountainous regions of Mexico. The wintering range of the Savannah Sparrow is equally impressive, stretching over most of the Atlantic and Pacific U.S. coasts, the entire southern tier of states, along with most of Mexico. Inexplicably, the only portion of North America where this species does not occur is in the central United States (most of Colorado, Kansas, Nebraska, Missouri, Iowa, and Illinois).

Among the most heavily streaked of all North American sparrows, the Savannah Sparrow is fairly easy to identify – particularly after a bit of careful visual and audio study. The Savannah Sparrow can be confused only with the Vesper Sparrow, and perhaps the Song Sparrow. Ultimately, however, the biggest challenge for sparrow identification students would be in learning to recognize the various genetic strains of the Savannah Sparrow itself. J. D. Rising (*Sparrows of the United States and Canada, 1996*) reports no less than 12 subspecies of Savannah Sparrow.

During Louisiana winters, at least two major genetic subspecies commonly occur (the western U.S. subspecies and the eastern U.S. subspecies), both with dark-brown to blackish streaking and both possessing yellowish lores (the area between the base of the bill and the front of the eye). Only rarely encountered here in Louisiana also during winter is the "Ipswich" Savannah Sparrow subspecies from the northern Atlantic coast.

All subspecies of Savannah Sparrow possess the same call, a thin, ascending "seeet!", which they constantly give in the presence of human intruders. Within a relatively short period of time, most birders will easily learn this call, which will often alert an observer to the presence of this species well before he/she can see it.



Le Conte's Sparrow Photographed by: Greg Lavaty

NOVEMBER 2011

LE CONTE'S SPARROW

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
		1	2	3 YELLOW RAILS & RICE FESTIVAL 2011 Jennings, Contact info 225-642-5763 Louisiana's first Golden-crowned Sparrow recorded West Baton Rouge Parish, 1940	4	5 Fox Sparrows begin to arrive in Louisiana
6	7	8 Harris's Sparrows begin filtering into northern Louisiana	9	10	11 Lapland Longspurs arrive in northern Louisiana	12
13	14	15	16	17	18	19
20	21	22	23	24 THANKSGIVING	25	26
27	28	29	30 Louisiana's first McCown's Longspur recorded in New Orleans, 1979			

Most similar in size, shape, and structure to Henslow's Sparrow, Le Conte's Sparrow is distinguished by its bright, buff-ochre face and fine, maroon-purple streaking on its grayish neck.

Le Conte's Sparrow is primarily a Canadian breeder. North American Breeding Bird Survey records show only a small amount of nesting activity in the United States, limited mostly to the Dakotas, northern Minnesota, and Michigan's Upper Peninsula. It is fond of wet, tallgrass habitats both in breeding and wintering modes.

In Louisiana, Le Conte's Sparrow is an uncommon and local winterer, found in a variety of damp to wet, dense-grass settings. In northeastern Louisiana, local birder Steve Pagans routinely reports this species from densely overgrown waste areas as well as from early-successional bottomland hardwood restoration sites within the D'Arbonne National Wildlife Refuge. In the latter situation, widely spaced hardwood saplings grow from a dense, mixed tallgrass setting.

Throughout much of southern Louisiana, where winter Le Conte's Sparrow observations are substantially more common, tall *Spartina* grass marshlands and harvested rice fields hold the majority of the population. Experienced birders know that a short walk in almost any harvested rice field south of Interstate-10 – especially along the uncut levees and edges – will more often than not produce Le Conte's Sparrows. Likewise, taller, more overgrown portions of intermediate marsh hold as many or more than do the rice fields, though the walking is far more difficult.

Unlike Henslow's Sparrow, which is substantially more retiring in temperament, Le Conte's Sparrow seems a bit more curious and, when disturbed or coaxed, will rise up to the tops of grasses much more easily than the former.

Interestingly, Le Conte's Sparrow is one of the few North American species to which sparrow expert Jim Rising (*The Sparrows of the United States and Canada, 1996*) notes no geographic variation in plumage, structure, etc.





White-crowned Sparrow Photographed by: Alan Murphy

DECEMBER 2011

WHITE-CROWNED SPARROW

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
				1	2	3
4	5	6 <i>Louisiana's first Brewer's Sparrow observed on a cheniere ridge, 1952</i>	7	8	9	10
11	12	13 <i>Louisiana's first Smith's Longspur recorded at Shreveport Municipal Airport, 1952</i>	14	15	16	17
18	19 <i>Lapland Longspurs move into south Louisiana ag fields</i>	20	21	22	23	24
25 CHRISTMAS	26	27	28 <i>Louisiana's first Green-tailed Towhee recorded in Cameron Parish, 1952</i>	29	30	31

With its pink bill, black-and-white “zebra-striped” crown, and gray body, the dapper White-crowned Sparrow (*Zonotrichia leucophrys*) is a favorite of many sparrow enthusiasts. Louisiana’s preeminent ornithologist, George Lowery, Jr., no “sparrow enthusiast” by any stretch, was nonetheless smitten by the White-crowned Sparrow, commenting (*Louisiana Birds, 1974*), “Few birds possess the debonair appearance of the adult White-crowned Sparrow. The way it holds itself erect, with the feathers on the back of the head slightly raised, gives it a peculiar distinction . . .”

Though juvenal-plumaged birds exhibit much streaking above and below, the adult White-crowned Sparrow is among the “cleanest” of all North American sparrows, possessing bluish-gray, unmarked face, neck, nape, and underparts, which contrast beautifully with its heavily chestnut/black/white-streaked wings and mantle.

Breeding from the Mountain West of the United States upward through western Canada and Alaska across through the entirety of northern Canada, the White-crowned Sparrow winters throughout the southern half of North America (excluding the southern Atlantic Coast), Mexico included.

In Louisiana, White-crowns tend to be locally common in agricultural lands with shaggy, overgrown fence rows and hedgerows. Typically, this species is encountered in small groups of 5-7 members, some in first-winter plumage, some in adult plumage – and often in the company of other sparrow species such as White-throated, Song, and Swamp sparrows.

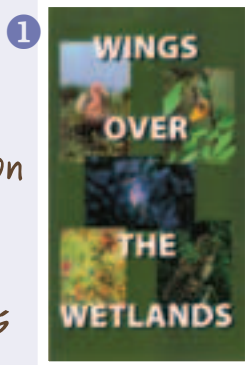
Not quite as “extroverted” as White-throated, Song, and some other sparrows, the White-crowned is nonetheless fairly easy to coax up onto an exposed perch by using one’s mouth to produce “spishing” or “squeaking” sounds.

As with White-throated and Song sparrows, males of this species will occasionally sing their breeding songs on warm, sunny winter days here in Louisiana. Its lazy, low-keyed, mournfully timbered song superficially resembles that of the White-throated Sparrow – enough so that inexperienced birders might confuse it with the latter. Field guide author David Sibley (*The Sibley Guide to Birds, 2000*) interprets the song of the Taiga race of White-crowned Sparrow as “feeee odi odi zeeee zaaaa zo000.”

BARATARIA-TERREBONNE NATIONAL ESTUARY PROGRAM

BTNEP Action Plan, PROTECTION OF HABITAT FOR MIGRATORY AND RESIDENT BIRDS Focuses on:

- education
- habitat restoration
- research
- monitoring efforts



Nearly a decade ago, the Barataria-Terrebonne National Estuary Program (BTNEP) began the implementation of one of its priority action plans – an action plan entitled “Protection of Habitat for Migratory and Resident Birds.” The first step toward implementing that plan was to gather up interested folks – those who shared a passion for birds, whether they were birders, ornithologists, wildlife managers, avian tourism professionals, or just interested citizens. Each year, this group was responsible for developing project concepts that addressed issues outlined in the plan. Those concepts have included education, habitat restoration, research, and monitoring efforts. Below is a summary of the educational products that we have developed.

For a free copy of any reports, posters, videos, calendars, or other products, contact us at (800) 259-0869, send an e-mail request to Sandra at sandra@btnep.org, or download pdf versions at www.btnep.org.

One of the first bird-related educational products developed by BTNEP was the documentary video entitled *Wings Over the Wetlands* (1). This 30-minute video presented information on Louisiana’s habitats and the connection to the many millions of birds that can be found here. *Wings Over the Wetlands* was aired on Louisiana Public Broadcasting channels and local outlets soon after it was developed. Today, we still distribute many copies of this video and have now included it along with two other documentary films on coastal Louisiana as part of a DVD package.

More recently, BTNEP developed a report on Louisiana’s cheniere habitats entitled *Vanishing Before Our Eyes: Louisiana Cheniere Woods and the Birds that Depend on Them* (2). This report presents information on the natural history of cheniere landforms (coastal woodlands) and their connection to birds. Chenieres are rather unique habitat types specific to the northern Gulf

Coast occurring from eastern Louisiana into eastern Texas. There is a strong ecological connection between these habitats and Neotropical migrants, particularly in the spring during inclement weather. These coastal forests provide for phenomenal birding opportunities where many species of songbirds can be seen during a single outing.

To increase awareness of bird migration patterns and the importance of Louisiana’s habitats to migratory birds, BTNEP developed a poster focusing on Louisiana’s role for both temperate and Neotropical migrant birds (3). The poster presents a few examples of different migrant birds, depicting both their breeding ranges and winter ranges while showing Louisiana as an important stopover for transient migrants and an important habitat for winter (temperate) migrants.

Following the development and distribution of our thematic calendars (4), it became evident that we should follow up with the development of magazine-style products (5) that presented a more complete life history about the same bird groups addressed in past calendars. Largely, we developed these new products because of the limitations of the calendar. To date, we’ve developed two separate products. One presents educational information of the life histories of Louisiana’s wading birds. The second followed a very similar format and addressed the life histories of raptors, including both those that nest here in Louisiana and those considered transients. We’re also in the process of following up with similar publications that address wood warblers and hummingbirds.

These projects represent just some of the activities in which the Barataria-Terrebonne National Estuary Program have been involved. Again, for a copy of any of these products, you can call us at 800 259-0869 or download a pdf at www.btnep.org



Front Cover, photographers clockwise from top left: Henslow’s Sparrow, Brian Small; Le Conte’s Sparrow, Greg Lavaty; Seaside Sparrow, Greg Lavaty; Spotted Towhee, Greg Lavaty; Bachman’s Sparrow, Greg Lavaty; White-crowned Sparrow, Greg Lavaty; White-throated Sparrow, Brian Small; Savannah Sparrow, Greg Lavaty; Swamp Sparrow, Alan Murphy; Field Sparrow, Greg Lavaty; Chipping Sparrow, Gerrit Vyn; Nelson’s Sparrow, Greg Lavaty

SINCE 2005, THE LOUISIANA COAST HAS SEEN ITS FAIR SHARE OF NATURAL AND HUMAN MADE DISASTERS.

In 2005, hurricanes Katrina and Rita proved to be powerful and devastating acts of nature, impacting both people and property but also negatively affecting natural coastal habitats and the birds that utilized them. In 2008, the Louisiana coast was hit again. This time, it was hurricanes Gustav and Ike almost following the same paths as the storms of 2005. On top of that, the spring and summer of 2010 saw the largest oil spill on record, much of which impacted the Louisiana coast. One has to wonder how resilient are these ecosystems and the animals that use them? How much can they take before they collapse?

Answering those questions is very difficult. Continued habitat loss combined with the pollution of the recent oil spill no doubt has to take a toll on our native fish and wildlife, birds in particular. One way to get at that answer is to conduct population surveys to observe and quantify impacts.

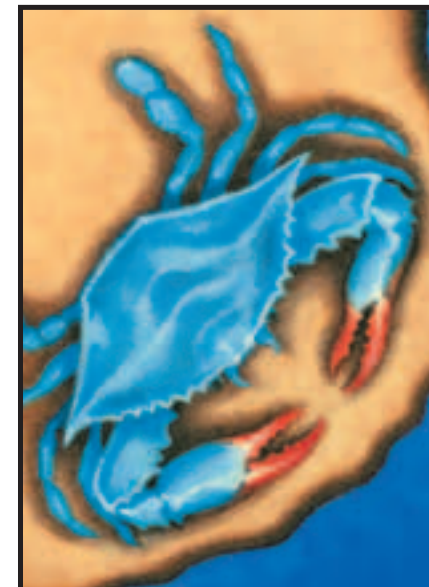
During the winter of 2010, the Barataria-Terrebonne National Estuary Program began planning for the second-ever ground survey of the Louisiana coast. The purpose of that survey was to document nesting birds, focusing on the following species: Wilson's and Snowy Plover, American Oystercatcher, Least, Caspian, Royal, Sandwich, and Forster's Tern, Black Skimmer, Brown Pelican, and Reddish Egret. We were also interested in monitoring two species of special concern: Piping Plover and Red Knot. Piping Plover is listed as an Endangered Species by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the Red Knot has been a candidate for listing. As a result of that planning, we were able to begin the survey soon after the oil spill occurred. As of midsummer 2010, the beach nesting bird survey was completed and we are now in the process of combining all of the information and comparing that to the data collected in 2005.

The 2005 and 2010 data sets representing numbers and locations of breeding birds provide for an exceptional baseline from which to compare future survey data. In order to evaluate potential impacts associated with the oil spill, the Barataria-Terrebonne National Estuary Program is planning to coordinate a similar survey during the spring/early summer of 2011. Stay tuned. ...

Almost simultaneously alongside the nesting bird survey, we began an effort to document oiled birds.

This effort continues even today. Here, we've documented all birds encountered along the survey routes, identifying all species encountered, their numbers, and the numbers of oiled birds/severity of oiling. It is expected that this survey will continue into the winter of 2010, perhaps later. Once completed, the data will be combined, analyzed, and a report will be developed that presents the findings of these repetitive surveys. Initial results suggest that the birds along the Barataria-Terrebonne basins of coastal Louisiana largely dodged the bullet, meaning it could have been much worse. While we did find plenty evidence of oiled birds, especially juveniles at breeding colonies, birds away from colonies were generally impacted during onshore incursions of oil when individuals' plumage could become contaminated by contact. This exposure diminished when oil was removed from the environment or became sufficiently weathered so as not to be easily transferred to their plumage. However, the impact of lingering oil contamination on Louisiana's wildlife will certainly be the focus of ongoing studies.

There are many participants beyond just the Estuary Program that have made these surveys possible. In particular, the American Birding Association awarded two separate grants to the Barataria-Terrebonne National Estuary Program and its Foundation in support of the oiled bird survey. It is that support that today helps keep this effort ongoing. In addition to those donations, these surveys would not be possible if not for the generosity and dedication of all those involved. Numerous individuals from the LSU Museum of Natural Science, the Coastal Bird Conservation Program, and birders in general have participated in these surveys. To all of these people/groups, the Estuary Program owes a great deal of thanks.



BTNEP

BARATARIA-TERREBONNE
NATIONAL ESTUARY PROGRAM

This document was published by:

**Barataria-Terrebonne
National Estuary Program**
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1-800-259-0869

*Barataria-Terrebonne National Estuary Program
thanks ConocoPhillips Company for its
generous contribution in producing this calendar.*


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Richard DeMay, Photographer of Left Photo

SOUTH LOUISIANA



AMERICA'S WETLAND BIRDING TRAIL

1. I-10 Eastbound Welcome Center
337-589-7774
2. Sabine National Wildlife Refuge Visitor Center
337-762-3816
3. Southwest Louisiana Convention & Visitors Bureau
337-436-9588
4. Rockefeller State Wildlife Refuge
337-538-2276
5. Cameron Prairie National Wildlife Refuge
337-598-2216
6. Lacassine National Wildlife Refuge Headquarters
337-774-5923
7. Lafayette Convention & Visitors Commission
337-232-3737
8. Acadiana Park Nature Station
337-291-8448
9. Vermilion Parish Tourist Commission Visitor Center
337-898-6600

10. Atchafalaya Welcome Center
337-228-1094
11. Lake Fausse Pointe State Park Visitor Center
888-677-7200
12. Iberia Parish Convention & Visitors Bureau
888-942-3742
13. Tabasco® Pepper Sauce Factory
337-365-8173
14. Cajun Coast Convention & Visitors Bureau
Franklin, LA 70538 • 337-828-2555
15. Cajun Coast Convention & Visitors Bureau
Patterson, LA 70392 • 985-395-4905
16. Louis Armstrong International Airport
Kenner, LA 70062
17. New Orleans Metropolitan
Convention & Visitors Bureau
504-566-5011

18. Audubon Louisiana Nature Center
504-861-2537
19. Audubon Aquarium of the Americas
800-774-7394
20. Audubon Zoo
866-487-2966
21. Houma Area Convention & Visitors Bureau
985-868-2732
22. Wetlands Acadian Cultural Center
985-448-1375
23. W.J. DeFelic Marine Center LUMCON
985-537-5800
24. Lafourche Parish Tourist Commission
985-537-5800
25. Grand Isle State Park Visitor Center
985-787-2559
26. Grand Isle Tourist Information
985-787-2997

27. Plaquemines Tourism Center
Belle Chasse, LA 70037 • 504-394-0018
28. Barataria Preserve Visitors Center Jean Lafitte
504-589-2330
29. BREC's Baton Rouge Zoo
225-775-3877
30. State Capitol Welcome Center
225-342-7317
31. Tickfaw State Park Nature Center
888-981-2020
32. Fontainebleau State Park
888-677-3668
33. I-10 Slidell Welcome Center
985-646-6451

For more information or a copy of an America's Wetland Birding Trail brochure, contact any of these locations.



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Barataria-Terrebonne National Estuary Program thanks **ConocoPhillips** for its generous contribution in printing this calendar.