

house sparrow *Passer domesticus*

Kingdom: Animalia

Division/Phylum: Chordata

Class: Aves

Order: Passeriformes

Family: Passeridae

ILLINOIS STATUS common, nonnative

FEATURES

The house sparrow averages about six inches in length (tail tip to bill tip in preserved specimen). The male has brown back feathers, black throat feathers, gray cap feathers and white feather patches on the lower cheek. A rust-colored line is present near the eye. The female and young do not have the black throat or chestnut patch and are covered with brown feathers.

BEHAVIORS

The house sparrow is a permanent resident statewide in Illinois. This bird was originally released in the United States in 1852 in New York. There were at least four releases in Illinois from 1868-1876. Most of the birds released were from Great Britain but some were from Germany. By 1886 they had spread to all of Illinois except the heavily forested areas. The house sparrow competes with native birds for food and nest sites. Nesting occurs from May through July. The house sparrow usually nests near human houses but also takes over bird boxes from other birds and will nest in any cavity or in a tree. The nest is composed of an enormous mass of plant materials and trash with an opening on the side. Both male and female work to build the nest. Feathers, hair, string and other materials may also be found in the nest. Four or five, white eggs with dark markings are deposited by the female. The female alone incubates the eggs over the 12- to 13-day incubation period. More than one clutch is raised per season. The house sparrow eats insects and seeds.

HABITATS

Aquatic Habitats

bottomland forests; marshes; peatlands; swamps; wet prairies and fens

Woodland Habitats

bottomland forests; coniferous forests; southern Illinois lowlands; upland deciduous forests

Prairie and Edge Habitats

black soil prairie; dolomite prairie; edge; gravel prairie; hill prairie; sand prairie; shrub prairie

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