

HOUSE SPARROW

Passer domesticus

SIZE: Around 14cm in length; wingspan around 24cm

HABITAT: Towns, cities, parks, gardens and farmland

FOOD: Seeds, nuts, insects, fruits, berries and buds



FAST FACTS

- House Sparrows are small chestnut brown birds. Males have a grey cap and black bib – the size of which indicates their status. The females have grey-brown plumage all over.
- Sparrows are social birds and live together in big groups called colonies.
- They build their nests in the eaves or crevices of buildings, and in ivy, bushes and hedges. Nests are made from a variety of materials like dry grasses and feathers. They lay around 3 to 5 eggs, and will have at least 2 clutches a year. The chicks are fed on regurgitated insects.
- Originally native to Europe and Asia, House Sparrows have settled in every continent except Antarctica, and are now one of the most widespread birds in the world.

ENDANGERED IN WANSTEAD

Sparrows are on the Red List of Birds of Conservation Concern and are a priority species under the UK Post-2010 Biodiversity Framework. Around 60% of house sparrows have been lost since the mid-1970s, and declines have been particularly acute in large cities like London. Research is underway to find out why. Starvation of chicks due to a lack of insects may contribute to the problem. High nitrogen dioxide levels from traffic pollution have also been linked to declines. There are colonies of sparrows peppered around Wanstead. There is anecdotal evidence that some may be increasing from a low base, but in other locations, they continue to be lost as people remove the hedges and other places where they live. If you're lucky enough to live near a colony, sparrows can seem ubiquitous because of the number and the energetic and noisy nature of the birds. However, there are huge gaps around our local area where you walk for long periods of time without encountering a single sparrow; this would likely have been unthinkable until recently.

HELP PREVENT THEIR EXTINCTION

- Provide food and water for sparrows in your garden. They'll happily visit bird feeders – but if you can, feed them mealworms or waxworms, especially when they're rearing their chicks in late spring / early summer (April to August).
- Make your garden a haven for insects – that means one thing, lots of foliage. Large areas of paving for drives and patios are disastrous for city insects and wildlife more generally – dig some of it up or cover it with planters to re-green your plot. Ground-dwelling insects, such as beetles, generally benefit from dense vegetation, including evergreens. Flying insects need flowers across the year – look out for ones with the Plants for Pollinators logo. Find ideas at www.wildwanstead.org/star-plants.
- Other great habitats for insects are long-grass areas, mini wildflower meadows, leaf and log piles and bug hotels. Never use slug pellets or pesticides.
- Plant hedges and shrubs to provide shelter and foraging habitat for sparrows e.g. hawthorn, viburnum.
- Have a bird bath – sparrows love a communal splash-about when it's warm.
- Install a sparrow nest box terrace.
- It's really important to protect colonies as house sparrows can take a long time to return to areas from where they've disappeared. If you're lucky enough to have sparrows living nearby, why not work with neighbours to ensure everyone understands how important it is not to damage their nest sites.

More information:

www.bto.org/sites/default/files/u23/downloads/pdfs/factsheet_housp.pdf

Help scientists track sparrow populations.

Report sightings at www.gigl.org.uk/submit-a-record/