



SONG SPARROW

The Song Sparrow is a much beloved year-round resident in the Urban Forest and adjacent verdant patches. They are readily seen as they walk or hop on the ground and flit or hop through branches, grasses, and flowering plants. Song Sparrows stay low and forage secretively, but males boldly hop up to exposed perches, including limbs of small trees, to sing. And it is in song that this diminutive bird truly stands out.

In fact, the Song Sparrow species derives its very name from its colorful repertoire of songs. The male's vibrant song 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.

The male's persistent songs, six to eight per minute at dawn in spring are associated with the maintenance of territory and the attraction of a mate. Because males and



females look essentially alike, it is in their divergent behaviors that we perceive the marked differences.

The mated pair selectively searches for nest sites together. Suitable nest sites are usually hidden in grasses or weeds, sometimes placed on the ground and occasionally as high as twelve feet, quite often near a water source. Not afraid of human habitation, Song Sparrows sometimes nest close to houses, often hidden in dense flower beds and shrubs.

Song Sparrows eat many insects and other invertebrates in the summer, as well as seeds and fruits all year round. The lush and varied growth within the Urban Forest provides a bountiful habitat, ideal for the continual foraging and annual

breeding needs of this most welcome sprightly songster.

Bird of the Month essays are written by Betty Kanne with photos by James Kendall.

