

Song Sparrow



Every bird article in the *Vistas* is inspired by a bird I have seen in the confines of Eldorado. I am almost out of new birds to write about, and last season I hoped I might spot a spring migrant I hadn't seen in our area. Luck was with me. A Song Sparrow (SS) appeared at my bird feeder briefly one afternoon in March. This typical sparrow-appearing bird is 6.25 inches long with a wingspan of 8.25 inches. They appear with many slightly different colorations depending on where this bird is found (31 subspecies!). The head is rusty brown with some white or gray streaks; the back and wings are a rusty brown. A light-colored breast has many dark or rus-

set streaks and may give the appearance of a dark spot in the middle of the breast. The tail is longish. It is resident year-round over a large portion of the U.S., coast to coast. The population map indicates that some SSs may winter in New Mexico. In general, their migrations are short and stay within the U.S. Best of all is their song, a distinctive and lovely series of trills. Go to http://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/song_sparrow/id to hear their song.

This stocky little bird prefers low, weedy, open or bushy habitat and forages on the ground. Pairs may stay together for several years. Courting males flutter and vibrate their wings, stretch out head and tail, and soar and sing to the female. Cup nests of grasses are built in low shrubs. Three or four eggs hatch after 12 to 14 days, and the helpless young grow quickly and fledge in 12 to 14 days. The female incubates the eggs, and both male and female feed the nestlings. Food consists of grass seeds, berries, and small insects. Some pairs may have two or three broods per year. The male sometimes takes over the active fledglings while the female begins the next clutch.

Studies show that the SS acquires its song during the first few months after hatching, and probably some learning occurs from hearing other SSs sing.

—Pam Henline