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**AMERICAN SPARROW BETTER BEHAVED THAN ITS ENGLISH COUSIN.**

**Forty Native Species in North America, Although Less  
Obtrusive Than the Imported Variety, Help the  
Farmer Where the Latter Hinders Him.**

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Washington, D. C.,                      While one usually thinks of the English species when the word "sparrow" is mentioned, there are some 40 species of sparrows in North America which are helpful rather than harmful and should be encouraged rather than discouraged; at least, this is the opinion of the United States Department of Agriculture's investigator whose "Some Common Birds Useful To The Farmer" has just been issued as Farmers' Bulletin No. 630.

While the English sparrow is noisy and obtrusive, the American species are unobtrusive both in song and action. These native sparrows, although so seldom noticed by the majority of people, may probably be found in nearly every part of our country, although not more than a half dozen forms are generally known in any one locality.

The American varieties resemble the English sparrow in general, although a few are more brilliant. A California species has a red head, as have several species in our East which are not so common. The snow bird is a sparrow which is particularly common in winter. It is a slate color with a white breast.

While American sparrows are noted seed eaters, they do not by any means confine themselves to a vegetable diet. During the summer, and especially in the breeding season, they eat many insects and feed their young largely upon the same food. Examination of stomachs of three species--the song sparrow, chipping sparrow, and field sparrow--shows that about one-third of the food consists of insects, comprising many injurious beetles, as snout beetles or weevils, and leaf beetles. Many grasshoppers are eaten. In the case of the chipping sparrow these insects form one-eighth of the food. Grasshoppers would seem to be rather large morsels, but the bird probably confines itself to the smaller species; indeed, the greatest amount (over 36 per cent) is eaten in June, when the larger species are still young and the smaller most numerous. Besides the insects already mentioned, many wasps and bugs are taken. As a whole the insect

diet of the native sparrows may be considered beneficial. There are several records of potato-bug larvae eaten by chipping sparrows.

Their vegetable food is limited almost exclusively to hard seeds. This might seem to indicate that the birds feed to some extent upon grain, but the stomachs examined show only one kind, oats, and but little of that. The great bulk of the food is made up of grass and weed seed, which form almost the entire diet during winter, and the amount consumed is immense.

In the agricultural region of the upper Mississippi Valley by roadsides, on borders of cultivated fields, or in abandoned fields, wherever they can obtain a foothold, masses of rank weeds spring up and often form almost impenetrable thickets which afford food and shelter for immense numbers of birds and enable them to withstand great cold and the most terrible blizzards. A person visiting one of these weed patches on a sunny morning in January, when the thermometer is 20° or more below zero, will be struck with the life and animation of the busy little inhabitants. Instead of sitting forlorn and half frozen, they may be seen flitting from branch to branch, twittering and fluttering, and showing every evidence of enjoyment and perfect comfort. If one of them is captured it will be found in excellent condition; in fact, a veritable ball of fat.

The snowbird and tree sparrow are perhaps the most numerous of all the American sparrows. Examination of many stomachs shows that in winter the tree sparrow feeds entirely upon seeds of weeds. Probably each bird consumes about one-fourth of an ounce a day.

The writer of the new bulletin has estimated the amount of weed seed annually destroyed by these birds in Iowa. On the basis of one-fourth of an ounce of seed eaten daily by each bird, and an average of ten birds to each square mile, remaining in their winter range 200 days, there would be a total of 1,750,000 pounds, or 875 tons of weed seed consumed in a single season by this one species. Large as are these figures, they unquestionably fall far short of the reality.

The estimate of 10 birds to a square mile is very conservative, for in Massachusetts, where the food supply is less than in the Western States, the tree sparrow is even more abundant than this in winter. In Iowa several thousand tree sparrows have been seen within the space of a few acres. This estimate, moreover, is for a single species, while, as a matter of fact, there are at least a half a dozen birds (not all sparrows) that habitually feed during winter on these seeds.

Farther south the tree sparrow is replaced in winter by the white-throated sparrow, the white-crowned sparrow, the fox sparrow, the song sparrow, the field sparrow, and several others; so that all over the land a vast number of these seed eaters are at work during the colder months reducing next year's crop of worse than useless plants.