

# HOUSE SPARROW

*The Mystery of the disappearing sparrow*



*PASSER DOMESTICUS (PASS-ER DOMEST-ICK-US)*

HOUSE SPARROW

A busy little bird who is never far from man!  
Find out why their numbers are in decline...

## I LOVE RUBBISH!

**T**he House Sparrow is a noisy, gregarious bird! They love rubbish and wastefulness and have even managed to follow humans all over the world!

They were once widespread throughout the UK although they have become something of a mystery bird in recent times. Their numbers are now declining in both gardens and the wider countryside which has earned them a place on the red list which provides information on species that are at risk of extinction.

The House Sparrow is most commonly found in farms, towns and gardens and doesn't like to live in unmodified areas such as woodlands, forests, grasslands or deserts.

**H**ouse Sparrows have always roosted socially in winter, often closely packed in evergreen shrubs, ivy-covered buildings, thatched roofs, under the eaves of buildings and even street lamps.



## House Sitting

[www.inra.fr](http://www.inra.fr)



### Tidy Nests?

The House Sparrow nests in a variety of different places, in holes in stone walls or rocks, in ivy or creepers on houses or banks or even on sea cliffs or in bushes. When built in ivy, the nest becomes an untidy litter of straw and rubbish abundantly filled with feathers, a little like our human teenagers!

### Naughty, Naughty!

The House Sparrow is quite aggressive in using the nesting sites of other birds, often forcing the previous occupants out! Sometimes even building a nest directly on top of another! House Martins and Sand Martins all seem to get bullied! (Don't worry though, this behaviour appears to be more common in places where the House Sparrow has been introduced.



### Eggs

The House Sparrow lays 5 to 6 speckled eggs. They can be black, brown or ash-grey on a blue tinted or creamy white background. They are of different size and shape as well as markings.



## BE A SPARROW SUPPORTER!



### FOOD GLORIOUS FOOD!

The House Sparrow's diet is diverse. It eats seeds, nuts, berries, buds, insects and scraps. It will eat just about anything! Sunflower hearts, high energy seed, peanuts, suet even kitchen scraps! In fact, research in 1940 found 838 different types of food digested in the stomachs of house sparrows.

### FLOWERS OUT! HOUSE SPARROWS IN!

This mischievous bird has an unexplained liking for destroying flowers. The sparrow takes a particular dislike for yellow primroses and crocuses, destroying them in gardens where they find them! They also enjoy taking dust-baths in new seed beds, irritating many gardeners!

### HAPPY HOMES!

House Sparrows will stay in your garden all year round if they have a safe place to hide and nest. They like thick trees (especially birch) and shrubs. They also like to nest in holes, such as gaps under the eaves of house roofs. House Sparrows are happy to nest in nest boxes.



### A PLACE TO BATH

Like all birds sparrows need to bathe to keep their feathers in trim – and they will use water and dust. If you don't have a pond, a shallow dish of water will make a sparrow bath. Leave a bare patch of earth for sparrows to use as a dust bath in the summer – but make sure it's in an open place so they can watch out for danger while they are bathing.

Although the UK population of House Sparrows is declining, they are still doing quite well in Neath Port Talbot; they are probably frequent visitors to your garden bird feeders! The House Sparrow's cousin, the Tree Sparrow, however has not been seen in Neath Port Talbot for a very long time. They mostly nest in holes and are therefore most often found in woodlands. They have a similar diet to the House Sparrow so putting seed bird feeders out may encourage them to return to the area.



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## Seed Bank

Although not a water bird, the House Sparrow can swim if it needs to, such as to escape a predator. House Sparrows caught in a trap over a water dish tried to escape by diving into the water and swimming underwater from one part of the trap to another.

### Big or Small?

#### Small for their Size?

The House Sparrow tends to grow between 14 and 15cm. It has a wing span between 21 and 25 cm and can weigh up to 32g.

#### Who's the better looking?

The Male House Sparrow has a chestnut brown streaky back, a grey crown and grey underpants with a black bib. The female is drab grey-brown with darker streaks. Who do you think is the most attractive?



### Missing Birds?

#### RSPB

House Sparrow numbers fell by a staggering 64 per cent between 1972 and 1996 with an estimated loss of 9.6 million birds.

#### RSPB Birdwatch

The results of the 2008 RSPB's Big Garden Bird watch survey showed there was an average of only three and a half sparrows seen per garden, compared to a figure of ten in 1979.



### Special Names

#### Local Names for the House Sparrow

Many of the local names for house sparrows are variations on 'spuggie', 'spadger' and similar words.



Image <http://www.thebirdnerds.com>