

Winter Sparrow Identification

Sparrows are tough but far from impossible! This sheet gives key field marks for six pairs of similar species, plus four other species. See a field guide for diagrams that illustrate the parts of a bird mentioned in the text. Look for sparrows in shrubs, fields, marshes, and wooded edges.

White-throated Sparrow

- common winter resident
- white throat
- black and white crown stripes
- a few adults have tan crown stripes
- yellow lores
- gray bill

White-crowned Sparrow

- common winter resident
- gray throat
- bold, wide black and white crown stripes
- all immatures have tan crown stripes
- gray lores
- yellow bill

Field Sparrow

- permanent resident, fairly common in summer, common in winter
- unstreaked gray breast without central spot
- rusty crown and eye line
- white eye ring
- pink bill, legs and feet

American Tree Sparrow

- rare migrant and winter visitor, mostly in northwest Arkansas
- unstreaked gray breast and belly, with dark central breast spot or "stickpin"
- rusty crown and eye line
- bill dark above and yellow below
- legs and feet dark brown

Chipping Sparrow

- common permanent resident
- indistinct moustachial stripe
- indistinct, gray-buff malar
- gray rump

Clay-colored Sparrow

- rare to uncommon migrant
- distinct moustachial stripe
- distinct, buff malar
- brown rump

Swamp Sparrow

- common winter resident
- white throat usually unstreaked
- gray breast with blurry streaks
- rustier wings

Lincoln's Sparrow

- fairly common winter resident
- white throat usually streaked
- buff breast with fine streaks
- browner wings

Song Sparrow

- common winter resident
- larger and chunkier body
- coarse breast streaks with central spot
- stout, gray bill
- pale supercilium
- call a distinctive "chimp"

Savannah Sparrow

- common winter resident
- smaller and slimmer body
- fine breast streaks, often with spot
- thinner, pale bill
- yellow in supercilium
- call is a high, sharp "stip"

Winter Sparrow Identification

Eastern Towhee

- common permanent resident
- uniform black back
- black wings with white on base of primaries, visible as white patch when wing is folded

Spotted Towhee

- uncommon winter visitor
 - white spots on black back
 - black wings with white spots on scapulars, coverts, and tertials; form white wing bars on folded wing
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Other Winter Sparrows

Vesper Sparrow

- uncommon winter resident
- thin, distinct eye ring
- chestnut shoulder
- white outer tail feathers

Fox Sparrow

- fairly common winter resident
 - large and chunky
 - rusty red crown, ears, rump, tail, back streaks, and breast streaks
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Le Conte's Sparrow

- uncommon winter resident
- orange face
- gray ear
- gray nape with purple streaks

Dark-eyed (Slate-colored) Junco

- common winter resident
 - slate gray head, back, and tail
 - white below
 - white outer tail feathers
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Sources:

- A Guide to the Identification and Natural History of the Sparrows of the United States and Canada, Beadle and Rising, 1996, Princeton University Press.
- The Sibley Guide to Birds, Sibley, 2000, Knopf.
- Arkansas Audubon Society 50th Anniversary Field List, 2005, www.arbirds.org.