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House Sparrow *Passer domesticus*



GENERAL INFORMATION

Referred to as English Sparrow, House Sparrow, English House Sparrow, and Moineau domestique, this species of Old World Sparrow, native to Europe, was introduced and has flourished throughout much of the world. Currently, there are 12 recognized subspecies of House Sparrow. In the introduced range, this species nests in natural and man-made cavities. Often found in bird houses, it excludes native species like Tree Swallow and Eastern Bluebird in North America. It is the most conspicuous urban species of sparrow and on the most common birds. House Sparrows are known to nest in any opening or cavity, where they build a nest using leaves, grasses, fabric pieces or scraps of paper.

SIGNS OF INFESTATION

Usually the first sign of infestation with House Sparrows is the birds themselves. They are very vocal throughout the day and are conspicuous in their habits. Signs that they may be nesting inside of a building are: nesting material seen in openings around the exterior of the building, especially soffits, concentrated areas of fecal material on sidewalks or on the side of buildings, and entrance holes where birds can be seen entering and exiting cavities. Nestlings are very vocal, especially when adult birds enter the nest, and may be heard through interior walls.

FOOD SOURCES

In their native range these birds will eat seeds and insects. The House Sparrows adaptive behavior of eating almost any grain product allows them to easily live in urban areas. They will readily accept



DIAGNOSTIC MORPHOLOGY

Adults:

- Small brown sparrow with moderate streaking on back
- Dark brown on back and dull browns or gray underneath
- Males have a black throat patch
- Females are rather drab overall
- Beak color is tan or yellowish



Immature Stage:

- Juvenile similar to female
- Nestlings with varying amount of feather development

handouts from patrons of bread, crackers, and snack foods.

LIFE CYCLE

Adults breed in season (March - August in North America), producing up to 4 broods in a year. Clutch size averages 4-5 eggs but can be upward to 10. House Sparrows are monogamous but quickly find new mates, often a helper bird, if a mate expires. Egg incubation lasts for about 14 days and chicks develop on 14-16 days. A single brood can be raised in less than a month.

CONTROL & TREATMENT

House Sparrows are an indirect pest to museum collections. If given access they could soil collections with feces or use pieces of objects as nesting materials. In general the major concern with House Sparrows in museums is the introduction/ attraction of insect pests. Bird nests are known to harbor many museum pests such as; Psocoptera, beetles (especially Dermestidae), mites, and moths (including Clothes Moths). All of these pests will feed on museum specimens and should be deterred by inhibiting nesting of all bird species in collection buildings.

Control is most effective by exclusion techniques, especially for nesting birds. Existing nests should be removed and any holes or crevices in external building structures should be filled or closed off. Posting signs for patron to NOT feed the birds may also help.

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Fact Sheet: House Sparrow

Images provided by Lynn A. Jones (Yale Peabody Museum of Natural History)

Cited Material

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