

The House Sparrow



Male House Sparrow

Scientific name: Passer Domesticus

Irish Name: Gealbhan Binne

Males: The male House Sparrow has a chestnut brown back with black streaks, while the underparts, rump and crown are grey. The nape is chestnut brown, the cheeks are dull white, and they have a black eye stripe and bib. They also have a light wing bar.

The beak is yellow-brown in winter, but black in the summer, and the legs are pale brown. The size of the bib indicates the dominance of the male bird within its community; the bigger the bib, the more dominant the bird. The male House Sparrow is sometimes confused for a Tree Sparrow.

Female: The female is paler and lacks the grey crown, white cheeks, black bib and eye stripe and chestnut brown nape but has a straw coloured stripe behind the eye.

Juveniles: Juveniles are like the adult female.

Song: The House Sparrows song is simply an incessant collection of their calls, which comprise various cheeps and chirps.

Length: 14-15cm

Diet: The House Sparrow's diet is diverse. It will eat seeds, nuts, berries, buds, insects, scraps and

lots more.



Female House Sparrow

Breeding: House Sparrows start breeding in May. They lay between 3 and 5 eggs and they are incubated for 11-14 days. The eggs are smooth and glossy and are white with grey or blackish speckles. The male and female take turns incubating the eggs, but the female does most of the incubating. Both adults feed the young.

Nesting: House Sparrows live in colonies around people and will nest in holes or crevices in buildings, or among creepers growing on buildings. The nest is an untidy domed or cup-shaped structure of rubbish: paper, straw, string. They will also use nest boxes and will even kick out smaller birds who are already nesting.

Interesting Fact: The House Sparrow is a familiar bird that has declined sharply and even disappeared from some parts of Ireland.

In the 1940's scientists examined what was in a number of House Sparrows stomachs. They found 838 different types of food showing that a House Sparrow will eat just about anything.

During the spring, House Sparrows often damage plants with yellow flowers, such as crocus, for reasons that are not yet known.

There are many stories surrounding the Sparrow. According to some, the sparrow hops around because it is his punishment for crying '*He is alive, He is alive*' to the Roman soldiers when Christ was on the cross.

To kill a sparrow or to have one fly into a house is considered unlucky too. For others the sparrow is seen to symbolise the gods of the household environment and family, and should therefore be looked after. Rain is supposed to be on the way if a group of sparrows is found chirping together.