

## North Texas Winter Sparrows Cheat Sheet

\*Indicates diagnostic feature(s)

### Genus *Spizella*

#### 1) American Tree Sparrow

- "Average" bird 6.25 inches +/-
- Long notched tail
- \*Thin streak-like rufous patch on the side of the breast
- Two white wing bars, upper bar distinctly shorter
- \*Distinct dark spot on otherwise clear greyish breast
- Rufous crown and eye-line on otherwise grey face
- \*Upper mandible noticeable darker than lower
- Prefers brushy edges
  - o Similar species; field sparrow (smaller and paler plumage)

#### 2) Field Sparrow

- Smaller bird 5.5 inches +/- "plump"
- No streaking on pale grey breast some individuals may have faint reddish flanks
- Long narrow tail
- A lot of grey on the face, some individuals may have a faint darker grey or reddish eye streak
- Two white wing bars, upper bar distinctly shorter
- Rufous crown
- White eye ring
- \*Pink bill; in combination with white eye ring and un-streaked breast
- Open grasslands and woodland edges
  - o Similar species; American Tree Sparrow (noticeably larger)

#### 3) Chipping Sparrow

- Smaller bird 5.5 inches
- No streaking on plain grey breast and under parts
- Rufous crown sometimes faintly streaked
- Two white wing bars, upper bar distinctly shorter
- \*Dark eye-line coupled with lighter "eyebrow" stripe and rufous crown
- Grey rump
- Pink bill and legs
- Common all over the place in winter
  - o Similar species; Clay-colored Sparrow, a rare migrant

### Genus *Ammodramus*

#### 4) Grasshopper Sparrow – a rare winter visitor

- Small bird 5 inches
- Thick "heavier" bill
- Pointed, short tail compared to body size
- \*Clear buffy breast and flanks, very faint or no streaking
- Dark brown crown with white median stripe
- Thin white eye ring
- Pill shaped dark spot behind the eye, back of "auriculars"

- Back is heavily streaked in black and dark brown
  - Flattish looking head, no “break” at the nape of the neck
  - Open grasslands
    - o Similar species; Le Conte’s Sparrow and Henslow’s Sparrow, also rare here
- 5) LeConte’s Sparrow – an uncommon winter visitor, but it is seen every winter
- Small bird 5 inches
  - \*Orangish/buffy breast and flanks with crisp, thin black streaking
  - Broad pale and black streaks on the back
  - \*Orangish/buffy eyebrow line and lower face surrounding grey cheek
  - Dark crown with white median stripe
  - Grey “ear” patch
  - Open grasslands, often will hold until flushed
    - o Similar Species; Grasshopper and Henslow’s sparrows

### **Genus *Melospiza***

- 6) Song Sparrow
- “Average sized” 6.25 inches
  - \*Prominent dark streaking on breast that usually converges in an irregular central spot
  - Clear white belly
  - Alternating brown and white markings on the throat
  - Thin white median crown stripe
  - \*Prominent brown eye stripe behind eye in a mostly grey face
  - Likes dense cover
  - Usually solitary
    - o Similar species; Lincoln’s sparrow (smaller and lacks central spot), swamp sparrow
- 7) Lincoln’s Sparrow
- Smaller bird 5.75 inches
  - \*Distinct grey eyebrow stripe and median crown stripe
  - \*Brown crown often streaked with black and looks raised, spiky “punk rock” looking
  - Buffy breast with crisp dark streaking above clear, white belly
  - Brown eye-line starts at back of eye
  - Dense cover usually near water
  - Tends to be solitary
    - o Similar species; song sparrow (larger with coarser streaking), swamp sparrow ( little or no streaking on grey breast, white throat patch)
- 8) Swamp Sparrow
- Smaller bird 5.75 inches
  - Lots of grey on the face
  - Brown crown with thin grey median stripe
  - Rusty brown wings, tail and flanks, combined with clear grey breast\*
  - White throat patch
  - Prefers grassy wetland areas
  - Tens to be solitary
    - o Similar species; Lincoln’s sparrow, white-throated sparrow( has white striped crown and more white at the throat)

## Genera *Passerculus*, *Poocetes*, *Passerella*

### 9) Savannah Sparrow

- Small bird 5.5 inches
- Lots of plumage variation
- \*Pale/yellowish eyebrow stripe and malar (jaw) stripe
- Broad reddish streaking on breast
- Small faint central spot similar to song sparrow but much less prominent
- Short notched tail
- Outer tail feathers seen in flight often noticeably paler
- Open grasslands
- Can form large flocks often with Vesper sparrows
- \*Likes to sit on fence wires
  - o Song sparrow (less prominent central spot) Vesper sparrow (smaller and shorter tailed lacks white outer tail feathers)

### 10) Vesper Sparrow

- "Average sized" 6.25 inches
- Similar, but generally paler than Savannah and song sparrows
- White eye ring
- \* "j" shaped white to cream marking surrounding the cheek
- Cream colored belly as opposed to white belly of Savannah
- \*Prominent white outer tail feathers seen in flight
- Shorter, notched tail
- \*Likes to form large mixed flocks with Savannahs hang out on the fence wires
  - o Similar species Savannah and song sparrows

### 11) Fox Sparrow

- Big bird, for a sparrow, 7 inches
- Pretty secretive likes heavy brush
- \*Heavily colored in reddish brown including back, wings, tail, heavily streaked breast and patterning around grey face
- White throat patch with reddish brown streaks on either side
- Prefers wooded areas
  - o Similar Species; savannah or swamp sparrows (both much smaller)

## Genus *Zonotrichia*

### 12) Harris's Sparrow

- Another big one 7.5 inches
- \* Continuous black patch on head, chin, and throat amount of black varies somewhat
- Pink bill
- Clear white breast and belly
- Two white wing bars, upper bar distinctly shorter
- Forms small flocks with White-crowned sparrow
- Woodlands and edges
  - o Similar Species; Not really anybody around here

13) White-throated Sparrow

- Bigger bird 6.75 inches
- Clear grey breast above white belly
- Distinct buff to white eyebrow stripe above grey face
- \*Distinct white throat with darker stripes on either side
- Two white wing bars, upper bar distinctly shorter
- \*Often has bright yellow lores (patch in front of eyes)
- Prefers woodlands and brushpiles
- Sings often even in winter its distinct song “Old Sam Peabody Peabody Peabody”
  - o Similar Species; Song sparrow (lacks heavy streaking on breast) white-crowned sparrow (has prominent white throat patch, lacks white/black crown stripes)

14) White-crowned Sparrow

- Big bird 7 inches
- No streaking on grey breast
- \*Distinct white and black stripes on head, head looks “peaked”
- Plain grey throat
- Two white wing bars, upper bar distinctly shorter
- Immature birds show tan and brown head striping
- Open grasslands and areas with light cover
- Forms flocks
  - o Similar Species; White-throated sparrow (lacks white throat patches)

**Genus *Chondestes***

15) Lark Sparrow

- Bigger bird 6.5 inches
- \*Unique facial pattern, reddish crown with white median stripe, white eyebrow stripe with added black streak at the end above reddish cheeks, white malar (jaw) streak with black streak below white throat
- Clear white breast with bold dark central spot
- \*White edging and tips on outer tail feathers
- Grasslands and open woods
  - o Similar Species; adult non-breeding female lark buntings, would be very rare hereabouts

**When it looks like a sparrow but it ain't:**

Pipits; larger than most sparrows, congregate in large flocks in short grass, **long narrow bill**

Female indigo bunting; more active, **constantly flipping and wagging its rounded tail**

Female red-winged blackbird; **bigger stockier bird, long narrow bill**

European House Sparrow, really an old world finch, **much heavier bill, black throat spot**