

TINY BROWN BIRDS – Revised Jan 13, 2017

Malaspina Naturalist Field Trip Jan. 14, 2017 by Clyde Burton & Heather Harbord

Sibley = page number in *The Sibley Field Guide to Birds of Western North America*

NG = page number in *National Geographic Field Guide to the Birds of Western North America*

♂ male ♀ female

1. Fox Sparrow Sooty (Pacific) 7” Sibley 421, NG 370
  - a. Here in winter but migrates up the mountains in summer (Knuckleheads)
  - b. We get the dark phase here
  - c. Large brown spots coalesce across the breast
  - d. Distinguished from the Song Sparrow by its dark throat, light yellow lower mandible and chunkier appearance. Larger bird. It tends to hop onto a branch and sit still.
2. Song Sparrow 6.25” Sibley 422, NG 368
  - a. Grey breast with reddish-brown streaks converging in central spot
  - b. Distinguished from the Fox Sparrow because of its dark beak and slimmer look. Smaller bird. It sits with its tail cocked and flicks it frequently in a nervous fashion. In some lights you can see that it has a grey eyebrow which the Fox doesn't have. Flies in low short hops whereas the Fox flies in longer swoops. Both fly about 3-4 feet off the ground.
3. Golden-crowned Sparrow 7.25” Sibley 429, NG 372
  - a. Chunky bird with a gray-brown clear breast with very light stripes
  - b. Yellow spot on forehead is sometimes difficult to see without binoculars.
4. White-crowned Sparrow 7” Sibley 428, NG 372
  - a. Clear breast with very light stripes
  - b. Noticeable white streak on head bordered by black streaks and a white eyebrow. In winter, these look rusty but never yellow.
5. White-throated Sparrow 6.75” Sibley 429, NG 372
  - a. Rare here but moving north. Beginning to be seen in Victoria and here.
  - b. Can be confused with White-crowned but has brighter white throat
  - c. Common on the East Coast
  - d. Distinctive song during breeding season
6. House Sparrow 6.25” Sibley 456,
  - a. ♂ has black throat and lores, white cheek, reddish brown upperparts.
  - b. ♀ is easily mistaken for a Golden-crowned Sparrow. Drab gray –brown, unstreaked breast.
7. Oregon Junco 6.25” Sibley 425, NG 374
  - a. ♂ Black hood,
  - b. White outer tail feathers flash in flight.

8. Chestnut-backed Chickadee 4.75” Sibley 321, NG 294
  - a. Black cap, white cheeks
  - b. Dark reddish-brown back and flanks
9. Pacific Wren 4” Sibley 331 (Winter wren), NG 300 (Winter wren)
  - a. Short tail is almost always raised
  - b. Tail and rear have heavy dark bars
  - c. Continually flits back and forth in the undergrowth. A mouse with wings.
  - d. Loud continuous song on warm days
10. Spotted Towhee 8.5” Sibley 406, NG 356
  - a. Easily recognized dark bird with rufous flanks and white belly.
  - b. White spots on wings
  - c. Red eye
  - d. Scratches vigorously on the ground for seeds and insects
11. Bush Tit 4.5” Sibley 323, NG 296
  - a. In flocks of 20+ and very fidgety
  - b. ♀ has pale eye
  - c. In winter, often travel with Chestnut-backed Chickadees, Red-breasted Nuthatches and Kinglets
12. Pine Siskin 5” Sibley 453, NG 408
  - a. Slender bill (a finch not a sparrow)
  - b. Grey streaked markings.
  - c. Some yellow on wing is conspicuous in flight
  - d. Usually in flocks. Rarely alone.
13. House Finch vs Purple Finch - Both 6”

House Finch Sibley 450, NG 402	Purple Finch Sibley 451, NG 402
Ws 9.5”	Ws 10”
♂ Less red on it but brighter. Clear pink ear spot.	♂ More red but duller and darker.
♀ Blurry grey-brown streaks more subdued than in Purple Finch	♀ Short dark streaks on whitish underparts
Lighter bill	Heavier bill and looks more aggressive
Slim bird	Chunky bird

Warning: The central spot on the breast is not an infallible sparrow field mark. The streaks may or may not seem to coalesce into a central spot on any of the streak-breasted sparrows.<sup>1</sup> There are 9 different sparrows in the Powell River area and 30 in western North America.

Tiny Brown Birds are often tough to see with the naked eye let alone try to focus binoculars on them. Study the paintings in the two field guides used here and try to learn one or two species each time you go out. If you start now, you should be in good shape for the 2017 Christmas Bird Count!

<sup>1</sup> Kaufman, Kenn *Advanced Birding* p.250