RESULTS OF THE 1982 SPARROW MIGRATION PROJECT

by Michael Sharpe, Winthrop

Although some birders seem content to let the fall sparrow migration slip past almost unnoticed, there is a cadre of true sparrow aficionados who eagerly await the crisp days of autumn when each weedy field harbors a satisfying assortment of these cryptically-colored birds. In the fall of 1981, a sparrow survey was organized by Nicholas and Oliver Komar [Eastern Massachusetts Sparrow Survey, BOEM 10 (August 1982): 189-192]. In the fall of 1982, this was expanded into a Sparrow Migration Project under the sponsorship of the Bird Observer Field Studies Committee. This report summarizes the principal results of that project.

Project participants regularly visited eleven selected sites between September 26 and November 7. The numbers of all sparrow species present at these sites were recorded. The species composition and peak migration periods for the study are provided in the table below. The peak migration period is defined as the period over which the birds-per-hour abundance was at least two-thirds of the peak birds-per-hour count for the season. Exact limits are impossible to determine for the less common species. This table does not include 286 sparrows that were observed but not identified as to species.

Sparrow Species	Number Sites	Number Records	Percent of Total	Peak Migration Period
Song	11	1260	48.3	Oct. 7-24
Savannah	7	367	14.1	Oct. 14-19
White-throated	9	346	13.3	Oct. 4-21
Swamp	11	210	8.1	Oct. 6-15
Dark-eyed Junco	9	167	6.4	Oct. 28-Nov. 5
Chipping	5	89	3.4	Oct. 16-17
Field	7	56	2.1	Oct. 19-22
Lincoln's	8	45	1.7	Sept. 26-27
American Tree	6	43	1.7	(after Nov. 5)
White-crowned	5	17	0.6	mid-October
Vesper	3	3	0.1	Undetermined
Grasshopper	1	1	<0.1	Undetermined
Fox	1	1	<0.1	Undetermined
		Total: 2605		

The sparrow migration actually began in mid-September about a week before the start of the project. Peak numbers for most species were observed during the second week of October. The migration period for White-throated and Song sparrows

appeared to be extremely broad when compared to Savannah and Swamp sparrows. Dark-eyed Junco peaked late in October with a distinct maximum on October 31. The only species whose peak is not reflected in the data is the American Tree Sparrow, a species that arrives late and often remains as a winter resident.

The relative abundance of the species varied considerably between the sites. A chi square analysis revealed that this variation is not due to chance alone. An analysis of habitat preferences has been deferred until a larger data base is available.

The Field Studies Committee would like to thank the following participants who submitted data sets from the locations indicated after their names: John Andrews (Lexington, two sites), Jim Barton (Cambridge), Seth Kellog (Southwick, two sites), Oliver Komar and Mike Greenwald (Newton), Nicholas Komar (Newton), Leif Robinson (Belmont, two sites), Mike Sharpe Sharpe (Revere), and Lee Taylor (Belmont).

MICHAEL SHARPE who works as a computer programmer has long been interested in natural history. A course in animal behavior stimulated his interest in birdwatching about four years ago. His interests now lean toward population biology, animal behavior, and subjects such as territoriality. He would be interested in joining others in research projects along these lines.