

APRIL 1- 14, 2022 NATURAL HISTORY NOTES

By Dick Harlow

SONG SPARROW



Song Sparrow, *Melospiza melodia*,
© Dick Harlow.

In Massachusetts, Song Sparrows are not migrants, but are considered permanent residents. Permanent residents do not move south of their breeding area for the winter but stay in a particular geographic area all year. However, here in Vermont, or at least here in Middlebury, our Song Sparrow population leaves sometime in either November or December dependent on the weather and then returns in March.

The Song Sparrow is considered a habitat generalist. Even though we will hear and see them around EastView. The preferred habitat for Song Sparrows is marshes, either freshwater or saltwater and brushy, shrubby areas of field edges.

Although you will see them in shrubs and perching low in trees, they primarily feed on the ground. They will eat seeds and insects as well as specific organisms of the habitat where they are feeding. For

example, they are known to feed on small crustaceans in a saltmarsh.

Song Sparrows nest either on the ground or in shrubs, usually fairly low in the shrub.



Song Sparrow, *Melospiza melodia*,
© Dick Harlow.

Because of where the Song Sparrow feeds and nests the species is subject to predators such as cats, snakes, and dogs, that might not bother other birds. They will always be subject to hawks and owls as these species are predators of many other bird species.

Interesting side note is that experiments have shown that the Song Sparrow's fear of hawks and owls is instinctual, whereas its reaction to cats is a learned behavior.

Another note is that Song Sparrows tend to be subject to Brown-headed Cowbird parasitic action. The action is for the

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Cowbird female to seek other birds' nests to lay their eggs and have the nesting female bring up the Cowbird young. This is why Cowbirds are considered parasitic birds.

Because Song Sparrows have fairly good success with raising cowbird chicks, there is a tendency for cowbirds to be on the lookout for Song Sparrows in particular, even though they will parasitize other species' nests as well.

SPRING



Daffodils emerging, © Dick Harlow

One of the forerunners of Spring and eventually summer are bulb leaves pushing through the soil from the many bulbs that we had planted last Fall or many Falls before. These bulb leaves will develop into beautiful colorful flowers. At this time, we see the environment as brown, resting, just waiting to spring into new life. We are looking for this new view of the environment, this burgeoning of life from the soil is a testament to our

nurturing desire for the beauty that comes from nature.

Daffodils belong to the genus *Narcissus*, a perennial that predominantly are flowering Spring plants. Other common names that fit into this group are jonquil or narcissus.



Daffodils further along, © Dick Harlow



Daffodils flowering, © Dick Harlow

I found it interesting that Ancient Civilizations not only knew about *Narcissus* but used it in medicine. The plant is said to have originated in Southwest Europe. The wild plants were naturalized, and the cultivated varieties became so well known that their bulbs

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were spread far and wide from the Far East to North America.

Daffodils will eventually show their colorful blooms in many a garden by the middle to the end of April. All those flowers will be a welcome sight as we celebrate the end of freezing weather and old man winter!

OBSERVATIONS

MAMMALS

White-tailed Deer

All Measurements taken at solar noon (1230 EST).

PRECIPITATION

Average April Precipitation for Vermont = 2.83 inches.

Total average monthly precipitation for four months is: 8.88 inches.

Total two week precipitation for April was 00.0 mm or 0.0 inches.

This is a 0.0 deficit for the month.

Overcast Days 1-14: We had 5 days, of overcast skies. Of those overcast skies 5 days produced rain. Considering we are in to the first two weeks of this month, I feel we are doing quite well. Our year tally is: