

WHITE-CROWNED SPARROW



(1) White-crowned Sparrow, *Zonotrichia leucophrys*,
Adult male, © Ron Dudley

"Little brown jobs" (LBJ's) is the colloquial birding term for any sparrow-like bird that is brown when we don't know the bird's name or can't identify it. When you see an adult White-crowned Sparrow, picture (1), it is so obvious what you are looking at, that 'LBJ' doesn't apply. However, if you were to see an immature White-crowned Sparrow, (3), you might confuse it with a Song Sparrow (2), or just consider it a 'little brown job.' Now, if a Song Sparrow and Immature White-crowned were feeding on the ground together, a new birder or one who doesn't bird that often might see a size difference and some plumage differences, but probably not enough to definitely say that one of them was an immature White-crowned.

Because Ron Dudley, an excellent avian photographer, gave me permission to use two of his White-crowned Sparrow pictures, I can show the differences between the two plumage types of the White-crowned Sparrow and how they compare to a Song Sparrow. However, please understand, Ron is a professional photographer, and I am an amateur.



(2) Song Sparrow, *Melospiza melodia*, Adult
© Dick Harlow

Notice that the Song Sparrow, (2), is striped on the breast and the immature White-crowned is not. This might seem obvious, but when you are in the field looking at birds, initially with the naked eye, shadows on the breast of the White-crowned and indistinct striping on the Song Sparrow can confuse the individual identification.

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(3) White-crowned Sparrow, *Zonotrichia leucophrys*,
Immature © Ron Dudley

The key identifications here are the pinkish bill, the head markings and the light gray belly. Notice the Song Sparrow has a dark bill. The head in the immature White-crowned is rufous and tan to rufous-brown and tan striped. The Song Sparrow has a wide rufous top to its head with a light stripe over the eye and usually a heavily streaked breast. The head color, head striping, and a light gray belly, is what to look for in an immature White-crowned Sparrow.

BLACK COHOSH



Black Cohosh, aka American Bugbane, *Cimicifuga racemosa*,
part of the Buttercup Family of plants. © Dick Harlow

Actaea racemosa, also known as *Cimicifuga racemosa*, is a late blooming plant that flowers in September and October. The common names for this plant are Black

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Cohosh, American Bugbane, Black Snakeroot, and Fairy Candle. This plant is a species of flowering plant that is native to Eastern North America. Landscape architects have used this plant in gardens to act as a fall flowering plant and to give accent to parts of a garden. Naturally, it can be found growing in woodland openings. Native American Indians used the roots and rhizomes for a variety of maladies, e.g. for anti-inflammatory concerns, as a sedative or as an analgesic.



Black Cohosh, *Cimicifuga racemosa*, flowers.

© Dick Harlow

Looking at the flower array on long stems, one can see how it might have been named 'Fairy Candle'. Also the flowers, unlike some similar species, smell nice and are attractive to bees and butterflies.

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And, here is a close-up of the flowers.



Black Cohosh, *Cimicifuga racemosa*, flowers.
© Dick Harlow



Late flying **Marsh Bluet**, *Enallagma ebrium*,
in October. First one I've seen this late in the Fall.

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FALL COLORS, WHY THE COLOR?



Staghorn Sumac, *Rhus typhina*, © Dick Harlow

The main colors of fall are red, orange and yellow in different shades, different intensities and tints. Although brown is a color, in the case of leaves, brown means that the leaf is dead without showing any color. In other words the color pigments that we would have seen are now gone.

One of the first small tree-like plants to show color, red and off red, in the fall is Staghorn Sumac, whose bright red seed heads provide birds with food as winter progresses.

The green color in leaves is due to the pigment chlorophyll. Chlorophyll is not stable and decomposes under direct sunlight. Therefore, plants have to synthesize it, regenerate it continually in leaves. In the fall with shorter day length and cold temperatures regeneration of chlorophyll stops as a normal function of trees going into their winter dormant period. As the chlorophyll molecules are reabsorbed the other pigments that are also in the leaf begin to show their colors.

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Various shades of yellow, oranges, and reds.
© Dick Harlow

Leaves have two other pigments besides chlorophyll that reside in leaf cells for the purpose of absorbing light at different spectrums, different wave-lengths.

If chlorophyll is the first pigment, then the second pigment is called carotene, which absorbs blue-green and blue light. However, when carotene persists in leaves after chlorophyll has been re-absorbed the leaf appears yellow.



Red Maple leaf, *Acer rubrum* © Dick Harlow

The third pigment is called anthocyanin and those leaves that have a large amount of anthocyanin in their cells will show the color orange-red or just deep red. However, for a leaf to appear red the anthocyanin has to have direct sunlight. Therefore, it is possible to have a leaf that appears red on the top and green underneath.

This is certainly an oversimplification of the chemical process that is occurring in leaves in the fall, but will give us a start in knowing why each of these leaf pigments appears in Autumn.

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OBSERVATIONS, Month of October

MAMMALS

Eastern Coyote (heard)
Gray Squirrel
Eastern Cottontail
Eastern Chipmunk
Meadow Vole
Muskrat

BUTTERFLIES

Cabbage White
Clouded Sulphur
Orange Sulphur
Milberts Tortoiseshell

DRAGONFLIES

Yellow-legged Meadowhawk
Black Meadowhawk

DAMSELFLIES

Marsh Bluet

Weather Tidbits

Month of OCTOBER 1-31, 2016

[All Measurements taken at solar noon \(1230 EST\).](#)

PRECIPITATION

**Total Precipitation: 70.4 mm or 2.8 inches.
1.2 inch below normal for the month.**

Overcast Days: 19

WIND

Highest wind gust: OCTOBER 26, 18 MPH,

Direction: Southeast

Average Wind speed for OCTOBER: 1.2 mph,

Dominate Wind Direction: South

Days w/wind gusts 20-30 MPH: 0

Days w/wind gusts 30 MPH: 0

TEMPERATURE

Mean Temp: 11.9 C⁰/53.4⁰F

High Temp: 25.0 C⁰/77.0⁰F

Low Temp: -3.7 C⁰/25.3⁰F