

Another Wednesday email highlighting an organism found here at LSW, the **House Sparrow**, *Passer domesticus*. This little bird can be found year round and is a frequent addition to backyard feeders. The house sparrow is native to Britain, northern Scandinavia, northern Siberia to northern Africa, Arabia, India and Burma. It has been introduced worldwide and found everywhere except Antarctica. Technically the house sparrow is an invasive species but it occupies a niche unique to humans, our buildings and food wastes. This means it is not directly involved in the decline of native bluebirds because the humans destroyed the bluebird habitat and constructed the buildings which favored the sparrow, not the bluebird.

Pictures below as well as another Levi Bittle "kid-video" highlighting the House Sparrow and a second instructional video from Levi explaining how to make an excellent flying kite.

Description:

- length: 5.5-6.5 inches
- weight: 1.37 oz or 39 grams (about 16 pennies, 1983 mint or newer)
- pale gray underparts
- cone shape bill (it is stronger than it looks, stronger than the webbed skin between your fingers)
- hazel-brown eyes
- capped head with dark mask
- black throat
- blue or green with gray/brown spotted eggs

Science!

1. House Sparrows are philopatric. This means they return to their birthplace after each migration causing local populations to become adapted to the color of their habitats, creating 15 distinct subspecies in the West. In fact in Italy there is now an "Italian Sparrow" (*Passer italiae*) which is a hybrid between the house sparrow and the spanish sparrow (*Passer hispaniolensis*).
2. A group of sparrows is collectively known as a blight, humiliation and a subdivision.
3. Sparrows can fly up to 31 mph.
4. House sparrows can have 3 or more broods per season.
5. Are bird bones hollow? Not in the sense of a drinking straw comparison, but bird bones are made of a matrix of bone material. This allows the bones to have lots of "air" pockets or areas without the rigid bone material. Interesting note: bird bones are actually more dense than human bone and for good reason. The stress of flight on small bones is enormous, and bird bones are small and fewer than human bones yet they are more dense by comparison. Bats come in second in bone density while humans are even less than bats. Density is simply a measure or ratio between the mass of an object and the volume of that object. Birds have different mineral amounts in their bones than humans, thus making their bones more massive by comparison. Small bird bones are more dense pound for pound compared to mammals.

Something for the kids and adults alike!

1. In Japan the sparrow is traditionally a symbol of loyalty.
2. You can attract these birds with conventional bird feeders, next boxes and gardens. These birds will readily eat insects and feed them directly to their growing chicks.
3. [VIDEO of Levi explaining some bird facts and identification. LINK](#)
4. [Coloring Sheet of House Sparrow](#)
5. [Anatomy of wing feathers Sheet](#)
6. Two different templates for the sled kite: [smiley face](#) to color and a [BLANK template](#) to be creative.
7. [Levi's instructional video](#) on how to make the Kite.

Perhaps the most exciting thing about birds is their ability to fly. One of the easiest ways to get kids involved in flight is to fly a kite. Over the years I have enjoyed buying, making and flying kites. There are several designs out there for making your own kite and a lot of them are overly complicated for young children. The design is called a Sled because the kite simply “slides” through the air. All three of my children have made the sled style of kite because it is VERY SIMPLE to make and very simple to fly. In fact I taught my son’s preschool class how to make this kite the summer before Levi’s kindergarten year. We flew them on the State Capitol lawn and had quite the audience. **Enjoy the print outs and instructional video.**

Final words: if a bird gets into your house or garage, please use caution when capturing the bird for release. Human handling can damage wings and cause extreme stress to the point of sudden death while in your hands. Also the bird will fight for its life by scratching and biting, often breaking skin.

Thank you and have a wonderful rest of the week.



