

## White-crowned Sparrow

By

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Members of this species spend the summer in the mountains and in northern North America and winter in the southern lowlands (Farrand, 1989; Kaufman, 1996; Sibley, 2003). They are present all year along the western coast and in an interior region extending eastward from California into Colorado and southward into northern New Mexico. These birds occur in a wide variety of habitats including boreal scrub, forest edges, thickets, chaparral, gardens and parks, and desert areas. They feed mostly on seeds and other vegetable material and insects. During the winter, they apparently subsist predominantly on seeds or other vegetable material.



**Mature White-crowned Sparrow**

The adults forage mainly by hopping and running on the ground but occasionally feed in low shrubs or make short flights to catch insects in mid air. They usually forage in flocks except during the nesting season. In some winters, large numbers of these birds occur near the San Pedro House (pers. obs.). Most of these birds migrate northward from SPRNCA in the spring but a few sometimes remain near the San Pedro

House in the spring and summer (pers. obs.)

The female builds the nest, consisting of an open cup formed of grass, twigs, and other plant material and lined with fine grass, feathers and animal hair (Kaufman, 1996). The nest is usually on the ground near the base of a shrub or clump of grass but sometimes is a few feet up in shrubs. The female usually lays 4 to 5 eggs, sometimes only three, and rarely 2 to 6 in number. She incubates them for approximately 11 to 14 days. Both parents feed the young, mostly with insects. Approximately 7 to 12 days after hatching, the young leaves the nest.

The number of broods per year depends on the breeding location, with one brood in the far North and 2 to 3 or even four in regions that are more southern.

**Recognition Characters:** (Sibley, 2003). This is a relatively large, long-tailed, and long-necked sparrow.



**Juvenile White-crowned Sparrow**

(Length 7 inches, wings spread 9.5 inches) Adults have an unmarked grayish breast. Mature adults have an orange bill and a black crown-stripe on each side of the head that contrasts sharply with extensive white areas on the sides and top of the head. Immature stages have the crown stripes

brown in color and the bill a pinkish-orange color.

## References

- Farrand, J. Jr. (ed.). 1989. 3 Warblers to Sparrows. The Audubon Society Master Guide to Birding. Borzoi Book. Alfred A. Knopf, New York. 399 p.
- Kaufman, K. 1996. Lives of North American Birds. Houghton Mifflin Co., Boston. xxv+675 p.
- Sibley, D. A. 2003. The Sibley Field Guide to Birds of Western North America. National Audubon Society. Alfred A. Knopf, New York. Chanticleer Press, Inc. 471 p.