

California Wildlife Habitat Relationships System
California Department of Fish and Wildlife
California Interagency Wildlife Task Group

WHITE-THROATED SPARROW

Zonotrichia albicollis

Family: EMBERIZIDAE
B798

Order: PASSERIFORMES

Class: AVES

Written by: T. Kucera

Reviewed by:

Edited by:

DISTRIBUTION, ABUNDANCE, SEASONALITY

Mainly a bird of the coniferous forests east of the Rocky Mountains and south of the tree line, the white-throated sparrow is a rare but regular fall and winter visitor in California from the Oregon border to Mexico (Falls and Kopachena 1994). Most records are from coastal areas, although it is also a fall transient through the eastern deserts of Mono and Inyo counties (Small 1994).

SPECIFIC HABITAT REQUIREMENTS

Feeding: Feeds on the ground on small seeds and insects when available in winter in a variety of dense thickets and weedy fields (Small 1994, Falls and Kopachena 1994).

Cover: Usually found in thick cover (Falls and Kopachena 1994) in riparian areas, weedy fields, and residential gardens.

Reproduction: Monogamous, but extra-pair copulations documented (Falls and Kopachena 1994); builds nest in dense shrub near clearing (Ehrlich et al. 1987).

Water: Drinking not observed; may obtain sufficient water from food, dew, or rain (Falls and Kopachena 1994).

Pattern: A bird of thick cover; rarely ventures far into the open..

SPECIES LIFE HISTORY

Activity Patterns: Yearlong, diurnal activity.

Seasonal Movements/Migration: Breeds in coniferous forests east of the Rocky mountains from tree line to the Appalachian mountains. Fall and winter transients in California occur from September to May, with most reports in October and November (Small 1994).

Home Range: On the breeding range, males spend much time outside their territorial boundaries (Jones 1987). In winter, white-throated sparrows feed in flocks, maintain dominance hierarchies, and the most dominant birds have the smallest home ranges (Piper and Wiley 1990).

Territory: Territorial in breeding season. Territory sizes averaged 1.0 ha (range 0.2-3.2 ha) in Ontario (Falls and Kopachena 1994).

Reproduction: Predominantly monogamous; extra-pair copulations are common.

Niche: Little information; merlins observed preying on adults (Lowther and Falls 1968). Sharp-shinned hawks implicated as predators during winter (Piper 1990).

REFERENCES

- Ehrlich, P. R., D. S. Dobkin, and D. Wheye. 1988. *The birder's handbook*. Simon and Schuster, New York. 785pp.
- Falls, J. B. and J. G. Kopachena. 1994. White-throated sparrow. *The Birds of North America* 128:1-30.
- Lowther, J. K. and J. B. Falls. 1968. White-throated sparrow. Pages 1364-1392 in O. L. Austin, ed. *Life histories of North American cardinals, grosbeaks, buntings, towhees, and allies*. U.S. Nat. Mus. Bull. 237, part 3.
- Piper, W. H. 1990. Exposure to predators and access to food in wintering white-throated sparrows *Zonotrichia albicollis*. *Behaviour* 112:284-298.
- Piper, W. H. and R. H. Wiley. 1990. Correlates of range size in wintering White-throated Sparrows, *Zonotrichia albicollis*. *Anim. Beh.* 40:545-552.
- Small, A. 1994. *California birds: their status and distribution*. Ibis Publishing Co., Vista, CA.

B798

Life history accounts for species in the California Wildlife Habitat Relationships (CWHR) System were originally published in: Zeiner, D.C., W.F.Laudenslayer, Jr., K.E. Mayer, and M. White, eds. 1988-1990. *California's Wildlife*. Vol. I-III. California Department of Fish and Game, Sacramento, California. Updates are noted in accounts that have been added or edited since original publication.