

THE MONTCLAIR BIRD CLUB

QUIZ 75

December 27, 2020

Can you identify these sparrows?



Link to ponder:
Natural [history and slavery](#).



THE ANSWER IS ON THE NEXT PAGE

They're all called "sparrow," but they in fact belong to two different, not especially closely related families of more or less small, more or less brown birds.

No. 2 is a white-crowned sparrow in formative plumage, the plumage worn between the young bird's first complete molt in late summer and its partial molt into an adult-like plumage at the end of its first winter of life. This particular individual belongs to the northwesterly population known as the Gambel sparrow, identifiable at all ages by the blank look to the face, created by the absence of a dark band between the base of the bill and the eye. In formative-plumaged birds, that band, like the stripes on the head, is dark chestnut-brown; in adult-plumaged birds, those areas are black, contrasting with the puffy white center of the crown.



Nos. 1, 3, 4, and 5 are house sparrows. In the birds facing away from the camera, note the very broad, coarse marking of the back; compare that feature with the



neat, fine streaks of the white-crowned sparrow. The stout feet and toes and blocky head with a noticeably swollen bill are also good id clues, and are readily visible in the first photo, which is of a freshly fledged juvenile; note the fleshy yellow flanges at the corner of the bill. Nos. 3 and 5 are females, while no. 4 is a male in mostly fresh autumn plumage: the pale edges of throat and breast will wear over the course of the winter to reveal the familiar black "apron" that makes adult male house sparrows so recognizable.



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