

## Swamp Sparrow *Melospiza georgiana*



**Folk Name:** (none)

**Status:** Winter Resident

**Abundance:** Uncommon to Fairly Common

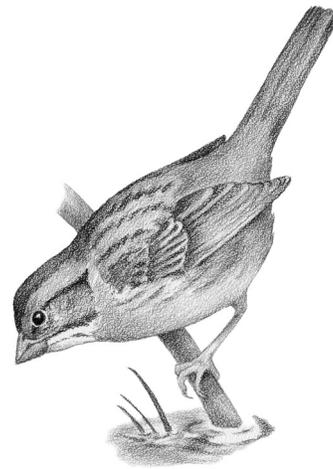
**Habitat:** Marsh edges, stream and pond margins, moist hedgerows

The Swamp Sparrow is a winter resident throughout the Carolina Piedmont. It is an inhabitant of wet thickets along the edges of ponds, marshes, streams, and other moist areas. Like many of our sparrows, this bird is a renowned skulker that often hides and moves about in deep cover. Spishing and squeaking work well to draw this bird out into the open for a good view.

Swamp Sparrows breed in much of the northern United States and Canada and south along the Appalachian Mountains into West Virginia. They breed locally in parts of Virginia. This sparrow does not breed in the Carolinas. After breeding season is over, Swamp Sparrows migrate south to spend the winter. Most winter in the United States but some head as far south as central Mexico.

Most Swamp Sparrows normally arrive in the Carolina Piedmont in October and leave by April. Our earliest arrival date is 17 September, and our latest departure date on file is 22 May. We have a single record from the months of June, July, and August. Dwayne Martin reported a lone Swamp Sparrow at a bird feeder at Riverbend Park on July 9, 2011. He noticed the bird had a disability and a growth on its forehead. While it could fly, it had a hard time walking. Martin speculated its poor physical condition prevented it from moving north with the rest of the Swamp Sparrows. Our peak count is an impressive 175 birds counted on the Chester CBC in 1937. Small numbers of a dozen or less are usually tallied on Spring Bird Counts in this region.

Leverett Loomis collected a specimen of a Swamp Sparrow in Chester County on February 1, 1879. He later reported that it was common in winter and abundant in migration and that he observed it most often in



Swamp Sparrow. (Gary P. Carter)

“undergrowth bordering streams, ponds, and swampy meadows.” On December 30, 1929, Charlotte’s William McIlwaine wrote: “Glory be! I identified today—positively a Swamp Sparrow. This has been my *bête noir*! Probably still is.”