

T. NOWICKI



WHITE-THROATED
SPARROW

By Timothy Nowicki

FRIENDS and neighbors who see an unfamiliar bird in their yard often ask me if I can identify the species they saw.

Though I try to visualize what they are describing and compare it with birds seen in our area, I'm afraid my success rate for identification is very low.

In order to identify a bird from a verbal description, it is important to know approximately how large the bird is by comparing it to common, well-known species.

Any information on habitat or habits can be helpful also. Most importantly though, what unique color patterns or field marks did the bird possess.

LAST AUTUMN, a few people described seeing a sparrow-like bird on the ground in their bushes. With a white stripe down the center of its head.

Even with a brief description such as this I felt very confident that my friends were seeing either white-throated sparrows or white-crowned sparrows.

The species are closely related. Both have a prominent white stripe down the top of their head and one across the side of their face above the eye.

These cousins of the bird world appear alike at first, but after closer examination their differences become apparent.

WHITE-CROWNED sparrows, as their name implies, have both the head stripe and face stripe, with a soft gray color to the breast.

White-throated sparrows, as their name implies, have a white patch below their bill in the throat area. In addition, there is a yellow patch of feathers between the bill and the eye. White-throats have a dark bill, as opposed to a pink color in white-crowns, but the remainder of their plumage is remarkably similar.

These two birds are relatively common in the fall as they search for food among your backyard bushes. Then again in the spring they will return north from their southern U.S. wintering grounds and allow you a second chance for viewing.

But as you can see, you will have to look closely in order to determine which one of these "kissing" cousins is passing through.

The University of Michigan will offer 23 off-campus credit courses in Dearborn this winter. Most classes will begin the week of Jan. 13.

A complete class listing and registration forms are available from the U-M Extension Service, 200 Hill, Ann Arbor, 48109-3297.

The Dearnborn courses include offerings from the School of Social Work. Others: anthropology, communications, computer and information sciences, education, feature writing, microcomputers, mathematics, sociology and public administration.

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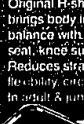
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