

Watola, G. 2011. The Discovery of New Zealand's Birds. (3rd Edition in prep.)
Based on: Watola, G. 2009. The Discovery of New Zealand's Birds. (2nd Edition)
Arun Books, Orewa, New Zealand.
Updated and amended text supplied by George Watola, October, 2011.
Page numbers follow Watola, G. 2009 (2nd Edition)
House sparrow: pp 235-237.

House Sparrow *Passer domesticus domesticus* (Linnaeus 1758)

February 1867 Canterbury
Self-introduced 1920 Norfolk Island

All the Acclimatisation Societies except Wellington released sparrows during the 1860s.

“As far as I have been able to learn, it was to Canterbury that the first sparrows came, but their advent, it is stated, was purely accidental, and their introduction was not contemplated on that occasion. The story is that the acclimatisation society ordered twelve dozen hedge-sparrows from England. The order was placed with Captain Stevens, of the “Matoaka”, who submitted it to a bird-fancier at Knightsbridge. Either the fancier or the captain blundered, and the latter took on board thirteen dozen house-sparrows, which are generally known by the common name of “sparrow”. He was very attentive to them on the voyage out, believing that they were the valuable hedge-sparrows which the colonists were anxious to secure.

Most of them died, however, and when he reached Lyttelton, in February, 1867, only five were left. The officers of the society, realising that a mistake had been made, refused to accept the strangers. The captain then took them out of their cage, and, remarking that the poor little beggars had had a bad time, set them at liberty. They flew up into the rigging and remained twittering there for some time. The members of the society had gone down below to look at other birds. When they reached the deck again the sparrows had flown. The birds stayed about Lyttelton for three weeks; then they disappeared, and when next heard of had been seen at Kaiapoi, about twenty miles distant, where, at the end of 1869, they were reported as being “particularly numerous”.

The Otago society liberated three sparrows in 1868 and eleven in 1869. Other consignments were brought out later on, until the colony was well stocked. Sir Walter Buller frankly pleads guilty to having been accessory to the importation of sparrows to Wanganui. He, on behalf of the acclimatisation society there, advertised in the London newspapers offering a reward of £100 for a hundred pairs of sparrows delivered alive. Both advertisements and importations were successful” (Drummond 1906).

They were also released at Raglan in c. 1865.

