

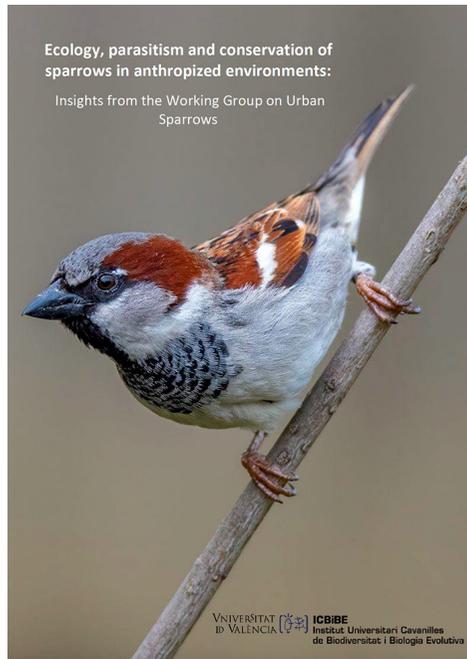
REVIEW

Bernat-Ponce, S., Mestre, A., Gil-Delgado, J. A., & Bernat-Ponce, E. (2025). *Ecology, parasitism and conservation of sparrows in anthropized environments: Insights from the Working Group on Urban Sparrows*. Universitat de València. <https://doi.org/10.7203/PUV-OA-9788491338444>

This volume is the proceedings of the *7th Meeting of the Working Group on Urban Sparrows*, held on 27-28 October 2023 in Valencia, Spain. The editors have compiled abstracts of the conference presentations together with six full-length chapters, focusing on the ecology, parasitism, and conservation of sparrows in human-dominated landscapes.

The book opens with a motto that immediately captures the heart – a passage from Miguel Hernández’s unfinished short story *El gorrión y el prisionero* (1941). It is worth quoting in full, for it is simply breathtaking: “Sparrows are the children of the air, the kids of the suburbs, squares and small squares of space. They are the poor people, the working class that has to heroically solve the problem of existence on a daily basis. Their struggle to exist in the light, to fill the grim silence of the world with chirps and fluttering, is a joyful, determined, unwavering struggle. They go to places where no other bird goes to get the crumbs of bread they need. They can be seen in the most remote corners. They can be heard everywhere. They take all the risks and dangers with the grace and confidence that their perpetual childhood has given them.”

The entire publication is available in open access (see above), which greatly facilitates its dissemination among researchers, conservationists, educators, and the wider public. The international flavour is evident from the very first pages: the list of contributors includes authors from Spain, Belgium, India, Finland, Mexico and beyond. The abstract section covers topics that did not develop into full chapters, among them conservation strategies in India (Mohammed Dilawar), the house sparrow invasion in North America (Ian MacGregor-Fors et al.), and the influence of urban park management on parasite loads (Eva Banda



et al.). Even these short contributions clearly illustrate global population declines and the search for innovative conservation approaches.

The six main chapters explore key issues in greater depth:

- Jéssica Jiménez-Peñuela examines the combined impact of urbanisation and avian malaria on fatty acid profiles and oxidative stress in house sparrows in southern Spain, revealing significantly higher oxidative damage in urban environments.
- Cristina de Bonilla Maas and co-authors investigate the prevalence of avian malaria (11.9%) in eastern Iberia, finding no marked differences between urban and rural habitats.
- Ashutosh Singh and colleagues describe the challenges faced by sparrows in Indian megacities, highlighting a preference for old buildings and a narrower ecological niche during summer.
- Marta Monfort-Calatayud et al. demonstrate that 100% of examined Eurasian tree sparrow nests contained anthropogenic material – particularly black fibrous plastic – an alarming testament to the ubiquity of plastic pollution.
- Jenny De Laet and co-workers (Belgium) position house sparrows and great tits as valuable bioindicators; long-term citizen-science data reveal smaller sparrow flocks in cities and reduced breeding success of tits with increasing urbanisation.
- Francisco Atiénzar presents an inspiring schoolyard project that integrates catching, ringing, and data analysis, successfully reconnecting children with nature through the humble sparrow.

The book's greatest strength lies in its practical orientation: field studies are seamlessly combined with laboratory, genetic, and behavioural analyses, yielding concrete recommendations (nest boxes, pesticide regulation, preservation of old buildings). The broad geographic coverage – from India to Belgium – enriches the discussion of both shared challenges and locally tailored solutions. A minor shortcoming is the rather limited engagement with historical literature. Many of the issues addressed – population declines, effects of urbanisation – were thoroughly studied decades ago (e.g. by J. Denis Summers-Smith in the 1970s-1990s or by Jan Pinowski and co-workers in Poland). Greater reference to these classic works would have provided deeper context and helped avoid the occasional impression of rediscovering well-established findings.

In summary, this is a timely, valuable, and genuinely inspiring volume that demonstrates how even the most “ordinary” bird can serve as a key to understanding profound environmental change. Warmly recommended not only to Passer specialists and ornithologists, but to anyone concerned with urban biodiversity and the future of nature in an increasingly human-shaped world.

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