

Both Buffalo sites were very similar to the Chicago location in that they were right downtown in a major urbanized setting dominated by concrete (sidewalks, streets, and buildings). The Chicago breeding site also contained a yew hedge, which was likely of some importance to the sparrows. The yews might have provided some shelter and cover for the nest at the beginning of the breeding cycle when deciduous plants are still leafless. The Gleacher Center, Wacker site, Thompson Center and several of the other Chicago locations with summering or breeding records of White-throated Sparrow all have similar evergreen shrubbery, as did the Buffalo, New York sites.

Still, these sites are noteworthy for their general lack of habitat; in the 1973 Buffalo account, the authors mention only Rock Dove, Chimney Swift, European Starling, and House Sparrow as resident birds in the vicinity of the White-throated Sparrow nest site, with Least Flycatcher, Carolina Wren, and Yellow Warbler the only other birds noted there. These birds may be choosing such unusual habitat for nesting because of the abundance of insects attracted to these sites by floodlights that lit up buildings in all three nesting situations as well as other bright street lights present at these locations. Andrlé (1974) also thought the abundance of insects near the nest site was the ultimate factor in why the White-throated Sparrows chose such an unusual site in which to nest. My guess is that in all of these cases, the birds that nested may well have wintered at the respective sites in Buffalo and Chicago.

Andrlé and Rew (1971) also mention “water available from precipitation and sprinkling ... relatively undisturbed cover ... and probably no predators” as reasons for birds choosing such an unusual nesting site. The Chicago birds had a ready supply of water (the nearby Chicago River) at their nest site. The availability of yews in raised planters offers the possibility of protection from predators such as rats (K. Wysocki, pers. comm.). Wyoscki described these planters as “2-foot long and made of smooth stone, i.e., the rats can’t climb up the sides” (see Figure 3). Similar protection from predators at both Buffalo sites was likely provided by low and rather high concrete walls (see Figures 1 and 2). Additionally, nearby the 1973 Buffalo church site were 12 concrete “boxes” containing various shrubs and small trees. Given that there is nothing especially attractive about the habitats that these birds have used, either in Chicago or Buffalo, this species is likely nesting, at least occasionally, in other large cities from about 40 degrees north latitude northward to at least the “normal” range of this species.

Southerly Limits of Breeding Range

The Chicago breeding attempts not only represent this species’ use of unusual habitat/location, but they are also one of the more southerly nesting locations in the United States, especially outside of montane regions. Interestingly, some of the most southerly locations mostly lie within 40 degrees, 45’ through 41 degrees, 45’ latitude from the East Coast to the Chicago breeding location. Confirmed breeding locations for Ohio that I could find

have all come from the northern tier of counties bordering Lake Erie. The farthest southerly location is approximately 41 degrees, 30’ (Peterjohn 1989, Peterjohn and Rice 1991). The species is known as a “sporadic summer resident” there (Peterjohn and Rice 1991), with no confirmed nesting attempts since 1932 (Peterjohn 1989). Brauning (1992) describes this species as a “fairly rare breeder in Pennsylvania,” and states that it “nests almost exclusively on plateaus where northern hardwoods and hemlocks prevail.” A few other comments by Brauning (1992) are germane to this paper. He states that “the species frequently sings and perhaps pairs off in migration, often lingering on its wintering grounds



Figure 3. Gleacher Center (and the probable nest hedge where the White-throated Sparrow bred in 2001) taken from Upper Wacker Drive on the south side of the Chicago River. Photo by Ken Wysocki taken in June 2002. Gleacher Center is along the north bank of the Chicago River between Columbus Drive and Michigan Avenue. The entire neighborhood is elevated; to get to the river, one must walk down a large flight of stairs.