

Repaired Bone Break In A House Sparrow

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Broken bones are probably a rather frequent occurrence in birds. But how many birds are able to mend these injuries before a predator finds them, or winter snows hinder the search for food?

One of the birds that did manage to mend a broken bone and survive was a male House Sparrow mist netted along with 57 others from a residential area of Jamestown, North Dakota on 24 December 1974. The specimen was prepared as a skeleton and flat skin for the collection of the University of Kansas Museum of Natural History (KU #69120). The left femur had been cleanly broken, and where the two halves overlapped the tips fused together (Fig. 1). The callus between the two halves was very compact and smooth. The repaired femur is considerably shorter (15.15 mm) than the right femur (18.75 mm) but it is not known how this affected the sparrow's locomotion. The bird was in good health at capture and apparently had no difficulty in foraging for food.

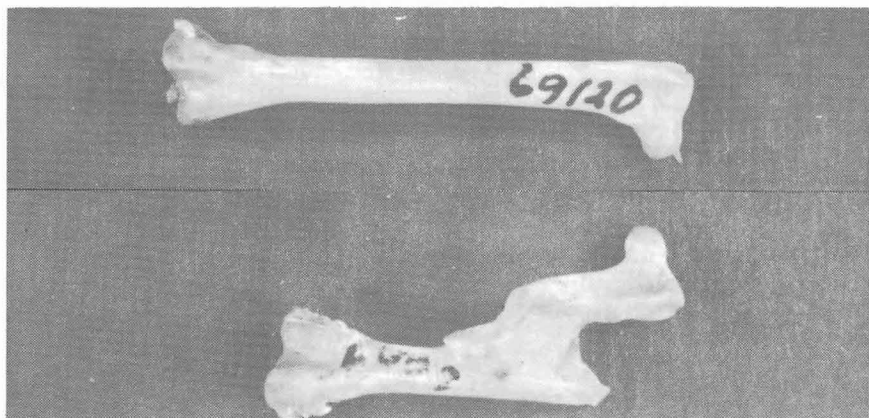


Figure 1. Repaired left femur of House Sparrow showing its size relative to the unbroken right femur of the same bird.

Tiemier (Auk 58: 350-359, 1941) found that 4.5 percent of the 6212 birds in the skeletal collection he examined had repaired bone injuries. The frequency of femur repairs was considerably less (0.23 percent). He also noted that passerines tended to show fewer injuries than other birds. Passerines, however, may die more often as a result of their injuries and thus the chances of finding birds with repaired bones would be much less. There were no bone injuries noted on any of the other North Dakota specimens.

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