

## Golden-crowned Sparrow — Ikauwiitii(q), Ikuwitii(q), Iiyapawawi'i

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IKAUWITIIT NITNIRTAARTUT. – GOLDEN-CROWNED SPARROWS ALWAYS SOUND BEAUTIFUL.

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Photo: A Golden-crowned sparrow in spring.

Sparrows are among the best-known birds in North America. There are many species and subspecies of sparrows, particularly west of the Rockies. Eleven species of these small, shy songbirds frequent Alaska, summering in brushy habitats from the coastal meadows of western Alaska to the rainforests of the Panhandle.

Golden-crowned Sparrows (*Zonotrichia atricapilla*) are one of several species that summer on Kodiak. These larger sparrows have a long tail, a grey breast, and a crown of distinctive yellow-and-black striped plumage on their heads. When they are excited or about to fly, they may lift the feathers on their crown. Golden-crowned Sparrows feed in flocks, eating seeds and insects. Although they build grass-lined nests on the ground, they spend much of their time perched in alder and willow thickets singing, preening, and twittering. Males make a distinctive, whistling call, singing three descending notes that sound like the children's song "Three Blind Mice."

In the Alutiiq world, the Golden-crowned Sparrow is a harbinger of spring. Elders remember watching for sparrows and geese to return to Kodiak in the days following Easter, so they could play games on the beach and take their toys out of storage. It was considered unlucky for children to play outdoors or with certain toys before spring returned. While they waited for the *ikauwiitii*, however, children could play string games to hasten the rising sun.