

## HOUSE SPARROWS (*PASSER DOMESTICUS*) IN THE AMAZON

NIGEL J. H. SMITH

Department of Geography  
University of California  
Berkeley, California 94720

The seemingly ubiquitous House Sparrow (*Passer domesticus*) has recently found a permanent home in the hot and humid Brazilian Amazon. In July 1971, I observed a flourishing colony of these birds in Maraba, a town on the Tocantins Rivers, in the state of Para. Local people remember a pair nesting in 1964; perhaps they flew down the Tocantins from Imperatriz. Exploiting an unoccupied niche, they have multiplied rapidly, but may now be checked by the number of suitable nest sites free of rats. They have caused an appreciable drop in the town's cashew crop

by eating the flowers. Another favored food is rice left out to dry.

House Sparrows may become a regular fixture of urban environments throughout the Amazon basin in the not-too-distant future. Maraba is being connected with the new Transamazon highway, a 3000-mile road across the interfluvial rain forest south of the Amazon river (see fig. 1). Within 6 years, *Passer domesticus* has spread 500 miles from Brasilia to Imperatriz along the Belem-Brasilia highway, another pioneer road opened in 1964. (Muller, J. Ornithol. 108:497, 1967).

First introduced to Brazil in 1906 to combat the mosquito problem in Rio, the subsequent spread of House Sparrows has always been associated with man. Taken to the south by the mayor of Bagé in 1910, they rapidly colonized this densely settled region. In the northeastern town of Recife, they were released in 1963 to feed on noxious park insects.

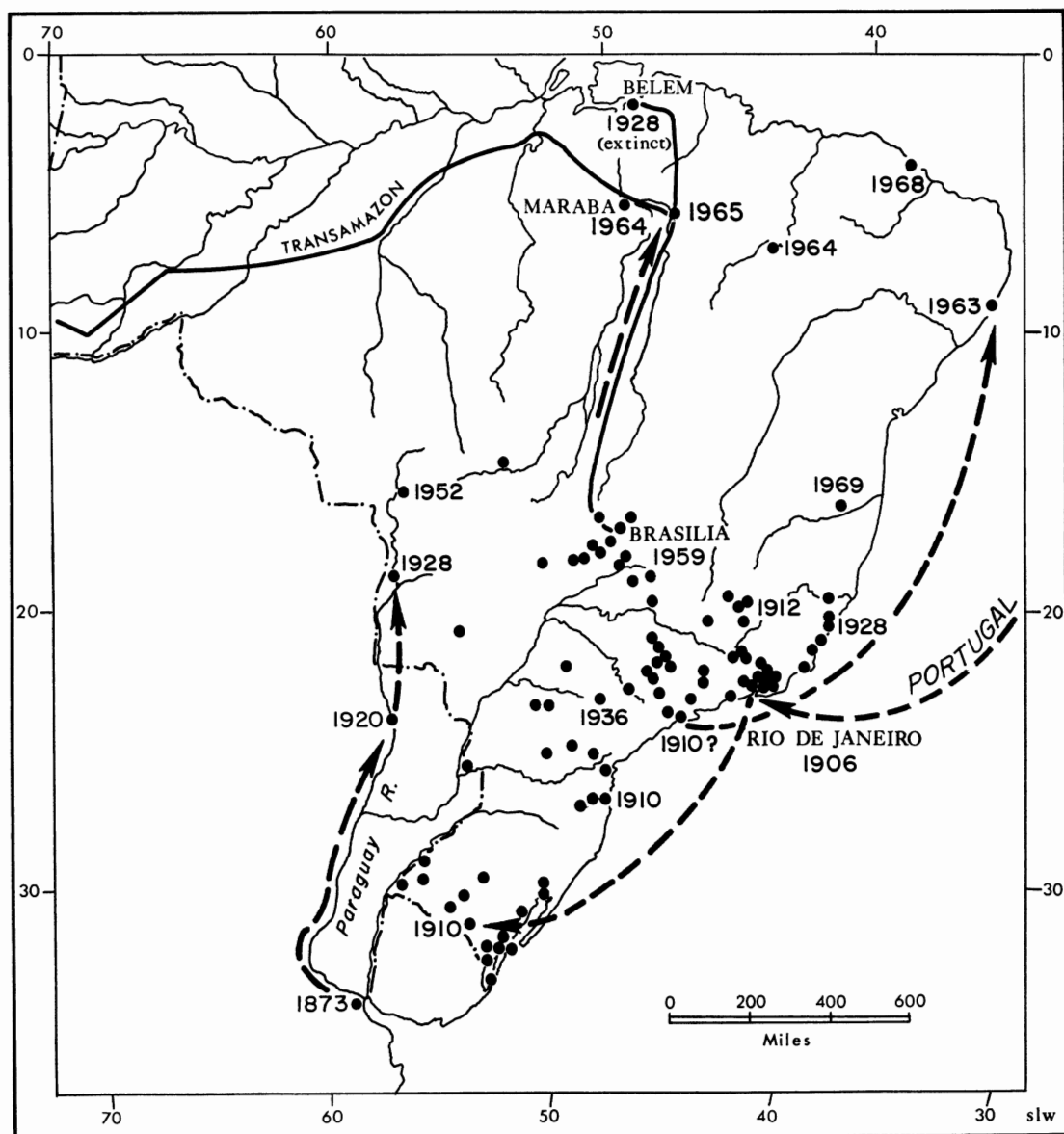


FIGURE 1. Distribution of *Passer domesticus* in Brazil.

By "hopping" north from one town to the next along the Paraguay River, they penetrated Mato Grosso (Sick, Bol. Mus. Nac. Zool. n.s. 207, 31 p., 1959). In Marabá, the House Sparrows are situated for potential colonization along the Transamazon highway.

Unfortunately, House Sparrows may also help spread Chagas' disease, an infection sometimes fatal to man. In São Paulo state, they have been found

carrying first instar nymphs of *Triatoma sordida* (a reduviid bug and known vector of Chagas' disease) in their feathers (Forattini et al., Rev. Saude Publ., S. Paulo, 5:193, 1971). These nymphs can be picked up easily from around nests and carried from house to house.

Accepted for publication 7 January 1972.