

# British sparrow disappearance studied

February 6 2006

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British scientists say they might have determined why the house sparrow, Britain's most familiar bird, has been vanishing.

Many suggestions -- including magpies, cats, pesticides, climate change and home improvements -- have been made for the disappearance since 2000, when The Independent offered an \$8,700 prize for the first properly accepted scientific answer.

Although the prize has never been claimed, The Independent says scientists might be getting close to a solution.

Kate Vincent, a postgraduate researcher at Leicester's De Montfort University, said her research appears to bear out experimentally that the sparrow disappearance might be due to a similar decline in the numbers of insects and other invertebrates that sparrow chicks need for the first few days of their lives. Although sparrows live on grain and other seeds, during their first week of life the chicks need animal protein in the shape of small grubs, flies, aphids and spiders.

The implication is that insects and other invertebrates are becoming much scarcer in Britain.

The Independent's prize is for a peer-reviewed paper in a scientific journal that accounts for the recent, sudden and precipitate decline of the house sparrow in Britain.

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