

ABSTRACTS FOR CONDOR 104(1) FEBRUARY 2002 C.E.

FEATURE ARTICLES

**NEST SITE SELECTION AND NEST SUCCESS IN A SONG SPARROW
POPULATION: THE SIGNIFICANCE OF SPATIAL VARIATION**

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Abstract. I tested the hypothesis that individual Song Sparrows (*Melospiza melodia*) choose nesting microhabitat that reduces their risk of nest predation, using two years of data ($n = 196$ nests) from two adjacent sites in California coastal scrub, one grazed and one ungrazed. Nesting habitat was compared between nest patches and random locations, and between successful and unsuccessful nests. In both sites, nest patch habitat differed significantly in structure and plant species composition from habitat available within territories. However, of six habitat characteristics associated with nest patch choice, only two were related to nest success, and that relationship differed between the two study sites. Only in the grazed site was the amount of coyote bush (*Baccharis pilularis*) in the nest patch positively associated with both nest site selection and nest success. In contrast, coyote bush was unrelated to nest site choice and had a nonlinear relationship with nest success in the ungrazed site, such that nests surrounded by intermediate amounts of coyote bush had the lowest probability of success. In the grazed site, nests surrounded by intermediate amounts of rushes (*Juncus* spp.) were also less successful. Nests built in larger, discrete patches of vegetation were more successful in the ungrazed site, but not in the grazed site. Although the sites differed greatly in the amount of preferred nest microhabitat available, there was no difference between the sites in the overall rate of nest success (23–32%). I suggest that spatial variation in the relationship between nest habitat and nest outcome may favor flexible nest-site preferences in this population.

Key words: California, coastal scrub, habitat selection, *Melospiza melodia*, nest predation, nest success, Song Sparrow.

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