

(*Ammodramus savannarum*)

The Grasshopper Sparrow is an uncommon to rare breeder in the Hudson River Valley.

Conservation Status

The Grasshopper Sparrow is a Species of Greatest Conservation Need in New York and is state-listed as a Species of Special Concern. Breeding Bird Survey data indicate a drastic decline in its population in the state in the past four decades. It has never been common in the Hudson River Valley, and the NYS Breeding Bird Atlas data show a decline in occupied blocks between the two atlas periods. Partners in Flight list this bird as Regional Concern in Bird Conservation Regions 28 and 30.

Identification

This small but stocky, with a flat-headed appearance and a short tail, is the only grassland sparrow without streaks on its breast. It has a dark crown with a pale central stripe, a narrow, white eye ring, a yellowish spot in front of the eye and a buffy breast and sides. Males and females look alike. Its name refers to its song, a high-pitched dry buzzy insect-like trill preceded by two short notes, which it sings from the top of a grass stem.

Habitat

This species prefers moderately open grasslands of intermediate height (4-12") and are often associated with clumped vegetation evenly interspersed with small patches of bare ground. Other habitat requirements include small amounts of litter and sparse coverage of woody vegetation (e.g., tall forbs or short shrubs). Grasshopper Sparrows are much more likely to occupy large tracts of habitat (e.g., more than 30 acres) than small fragments.

Food

The Grasshopper Sparrow eats mostly insects, grasshoppers, and some seeds. It forages exclusively on exposed bare ground.

Nesting

The nest is built by the female and is a cup made of grass stems and blades domed with overhanging grasses with a side entrance. It is placed in a shallow depression, with the rim level or slightly above the ground. The inside of the nest is lined with fine grasses, sedge, and sometimes hair. Grasshopper Sparrows nest in loose colonies, with an average individual territory size of 2-4 acres.

Threats

- Loss of habitat from development.
- Reforestation of grasslands and pastures.
- Conversion of grasslands and pastures to row crops.
- Nest destruction due to early mowing.
- Application of pesticides and insecticides reducing prey availability.
- Predation by mammals, including skunks, weasels, foxes, and feral cats, also birds such as Northern Harriers and Sharp-shinned Hawks.



The Grasshopper Sparrow uses elevated perches for singing.

(*Ammodramus savannarum*)

Management Recommendations

- Provide areas of suitable habitat large enough to support breeding populations by creating patches from 25-40 acres whenever possible.
- Treat portions of large areas on a rotational schedule to provide a mosaic of successional stages.
- Treat small, isolated areas as part of a larger mosaic, ensuring a variety of successional stages.
- Avoid disturbing nesting habitat during the breeding season, approximately end of April to beginning of August. Treatments or management that cause disturbance should be done in early spring (several weeks prior to the arrival of adults on the breeding grounds) or in the fall after the breeding season.
- Maintain open grassland by prescribed burning once every 2-4 years. This disturbance should occur prior to or following the breeding season.
- Mowing prior to arrival in spring can improve habitat and may be preferable to prescribed burning.
- Encourage light to moderate grazing in hayfields.



Grassland habitat in NY

This management summary is adapted from Dechant et al. 2003, NatureServe 2008 and Vickery 1996.

For additional information, see the following references:

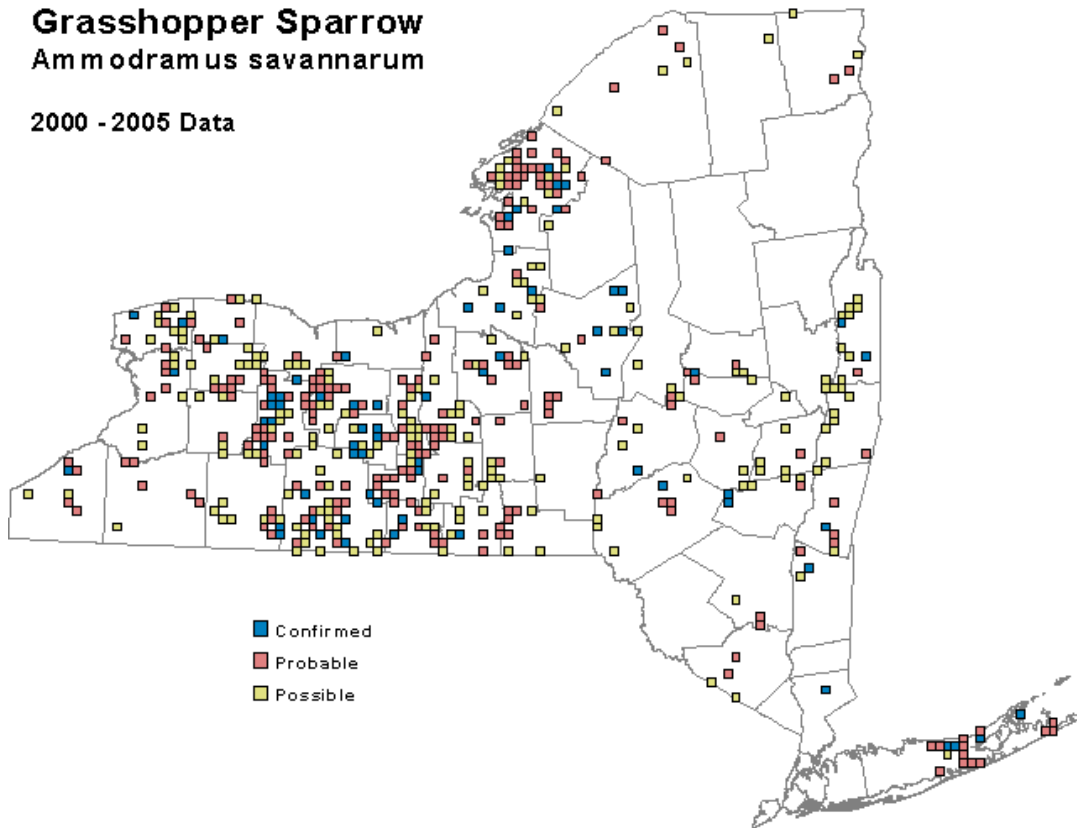
- Balent, K. L., Norment, C. J. 2003. Demographic characteristics of a Grasshopper Sparrow population in a highly fragmented landscape of western New York State. *Journal of Field Ornithology* 74:341–348.
- Bollinger, E. K. 1996. Successional changes and habitat selection in hayfield bird communities. *Auk* 112: 720–730. <http://elibrary.unm.edu/sora/Auk/v112n03/p0720-p0730.pdf>
- Dechant, J. A., M. L. Sondreal, D. H. Johnson, L. D. Igl, C. M. Goldade, M. P. Nenneman, and B. R. Euliss. 2003. Effects of management practices on grassland birds: Grasshopper Sparrow. Northern Prairie Wildlife Research Center, Jamestown, ND. Northern Prairie Wildlife Research Center Online. <http://www.npwrc.usgs.gov/resource/literatr/grasbird/grsp/grsp.htm>
- Illinois Natural History Survey. 2008. Grasshopper Sparrow. <http://www.inhs.uiuc.edu/chf/pub/ifwis/birds/grasshopper-sparrow.html>
- Johnson, D.H., L.D. Igl., A. Dechant, M.L. Sondreal, C.M. Goldade, M.P. Nenneman, and B.R. Euliss. 1999. Species Management Abstract: Grasshopper Sparrow. The Nature Conservancy, Arlington, VA. <http://conserveonline.org/docs/2001/04/grsp.doc>.
- NatureServe. 2008. NatureServe Explorer: an Online Encyclopedia of Life [web application]. Version 7.0. NatureServe, Arlington, Virginia. Available <http://www.natureserve.org/explorer>.
- Smith, D. J., C. R. Smith. 1992. Henslow's Sparrow and Grasshopper Sparrow: a comparison of habitat use in Finger Lakes National Forest, *New York Bird Observer* 20: 187–194.
- Throgmartin, W. E., M. G. Knutson, and J. R. Sauer. 2006. Predicting regional abundance of rare grassland birds with a hierarchical spatial count model. *Condor* 108:25-46.
- Vickery, Peter D. 1996. Grasshopper Sparrow (*Ammodramus savannarum*), *The Birds of North America Online* (A. Poole, ed.). Ithaca: Cornell Lab of Ornithology; Retrieved from the Birds of North America Online: <http://bna.birds.cornell.edu/bna/species/239>

(*Ammodramus savannarum*)

NYS BREEDING BIRD ATLAS COMPARATIVE DATA

Grasshopper Sparrow *Ammodramus savannarum*

2000 - 2005 Data



Grasshopper Sparrow *Ammodramus savannarum*

1980 - 1985 Data

