

The Short-eared Owl is an uncommon wintering species in the Hudson River Valley.

Conservation Status

This species is listed as a Species of Greatest Conservation Need and as Endangered in New York, as a Species of Continental Concern by Partners in Flight in Bird Conservation Region 13, and receives a “Yellow” designation from the National Audubon Society as a species of national conservation concern.

Identification

This crow-sized bird has barely visible ear tufts and a whitish facial disk with a dark area around a bright yellow eye. The upperparts are orange-brown to buff colored with some streaking. The underparts are much lighter with bold vertical streaking on the breast and a pale belly that is lightly streaked. The wings are long and the legs and feet are feathered. The sexes are similar. It flies low over grasslands or marshes and its flight is described as “moth or bat-like.”

Habitat

It inhabits open areas such as grasslands, hayfields, fallow farm fields, and pastures, as well as fresh and salt water marshes. Day roosts are typically on the ground, but also may be under low shrubs, in conifers, or low open perches such as fence posts. Large blocks of habitat greater than 250 acres are essential for Short-eared Owls. In the winter they commonly roost communally in sheltered sites close to their feeding grounds. They are attracted to areas with large population of meadow voles.

Food

The primary prey of Short-eared Owls is the meadow vole. They hunt predominantly by flying low over open areas in coursing flights much like the Northern Harrier. Upon detecting prey, the owl drops or pounces, sometimes briefly hovering beforehand. They may also hunt from a perch and dive directly on prey. At times they also hunt using a hovering flight similar to American Kestrels.

Threats

- Habitat loss due to development
- Succession of pastures and hayfield to forest
- Loss of wetlands
- Changes in farming practices such as conversion of hayfields to row crops
- Risk of predation by domestic or feral cats and dogs in developed areas
- Decline of prey base in areas where humans are attempting to control rodent populations by poisoning



Blocks of habitat greater than 250 acres are essential for Short-eared Owls.

Management Recommendations

The preferred habitat for Short-eared Owls requires management or it will transition to a less desirable habitat. Management efforts that target traditional wintering areas and roost sites may be more successful than other areas.

Potential management practices include the following:

- Periodic burning, mowing and plowing of fields in seasons when the owls are not present. Care must be taken to allow for adequate build-up of the litter layer that provides habitat for microtine rodents. Microtus populations require adequate overhead cover in the form of thatch and dense grasses for several aspects of their ecology. Maintenance of an adequate prey base is essential, since distribution and abundance seems to be tied to prey density.
- Maintain large areas of open habitat so that wintering areas can be maintained.
- Monitor wintering areas and roost sites each winter.
- Avoid disturbance of suitable habitat during the breeding season, April 15 to August 15.



Grassland habitat in NY

This management summary was adapted from NatureServe 2008, NYNHP 2008 and Schneider 2003.

For additional information, see the following references:

Clark, R. J. 1975. A field study of the Short-eared Owl, *Asio flammeus* (Pontoppidan) in North America. *Wildlife Monographs* 47:1-67.

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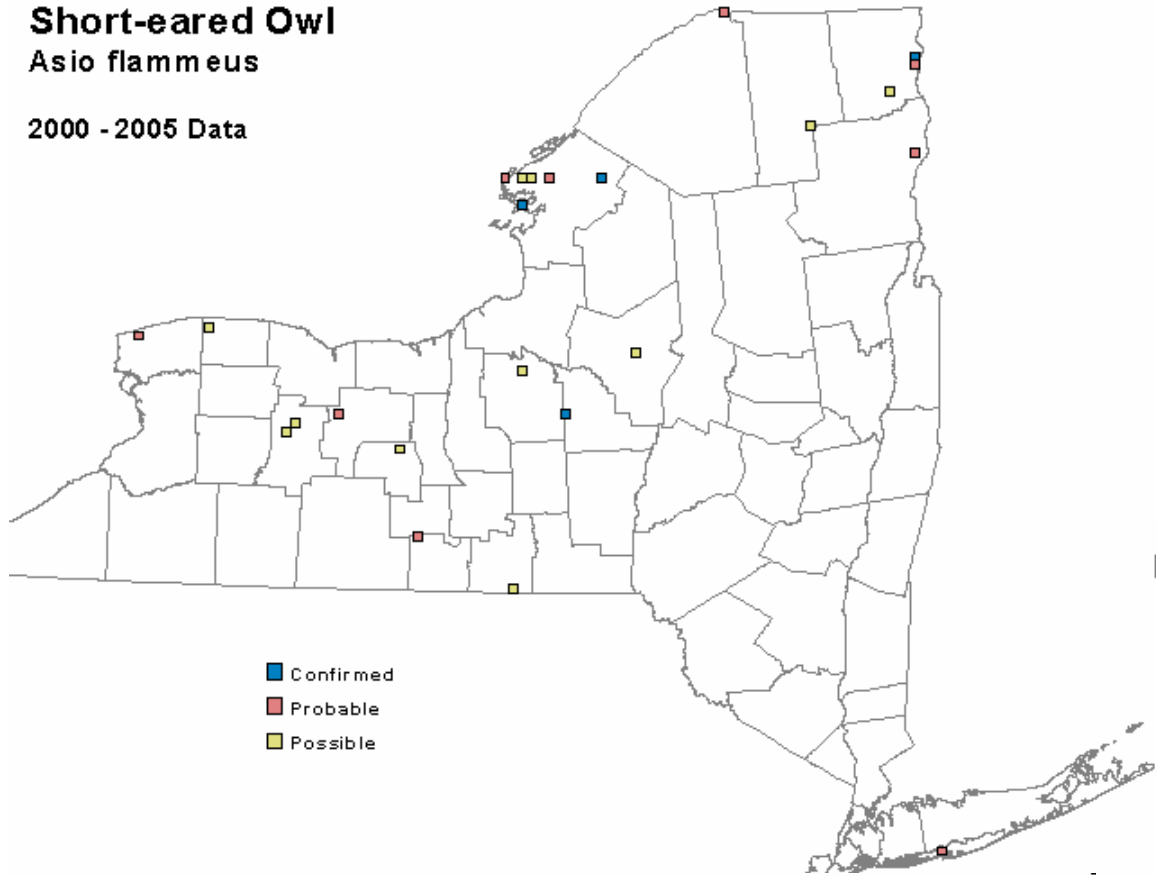
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Wiggins, D. A., D. W. Holt and S. M. Leasure. 2006. Short-eared Owl (*Asio flammeus*), *The Birds of North America Online* (A. Poole, ed.). Ithaca: Cornell Lab of Ornithology; Retrieved from the Birds of North America Online: <http://bna.birds.cornell.edu/bna/species/062>

NYS BREEDING BIRD ATLAS COMPARATIVE DATA

Short-eared Owl *Asio flammeus*

2000 - 2005 Data



Short-eared Owl *Asio flammeus*

1980 - 1985 Data

