

The Upland Sandpiper is a rare breeder in the Hudson River Valley. It can be seen during spring and fall migration in low grassy areas, such as turf farms.

Conservation Status

The Upland Sandpiper is considered a Species of Greatest Conservation Need and listed as Threatened in New York. It is also considered a Species of High Concern by the Northern Atlantic Regional Shorebird Plan. Breeding Bird Survey data show a drastic population decline in NY since 1966. NYS Breeding Bird Atlas maps also show a reduced distribution in the Hudson River Valley.



Identification

This species has a long neck, large eyes, small dovelike head, and characteristic "wolf whistle" call, which make it easy to identify. It is about 12" high, with a wing span of about 26," a scaly-brown back, streaked breast and neck, and a white belly. The bill is about the same length as the head. Upland Sandpipers can often be seen perched on fence posts.

Habitat

The Upland Sandpiper needs large open areas of short grass for feeding and courtship, interspersed with taller grasses for nesting and brood cover. At a minimum, they need about 150 acres of open habitat. Typical habitats include grazed pastures, meadows, hayfields, airfields, open grassy areas on military bases, and highway rights-of-way. A pair's territory size is about 20-30 acres.

Food

This bird eats mainly insects such as grasshoppers and crickets, but will also pick up seeds. It looks something like a robin when it feeds, running along the ground and then pausing if it detects something edible.

Nesting

Their nest is a shallow depression in the ground lined with dry grass. Nests are usually well hidden, frequently by vegetation that hangs over the nest, hiding it from above.

Threats

- Changes in farming practices, including earlier and more frequent mowing and increased cultivation of row crops.
- Loss and fragmentation of grasslands from suburban development.
- Natural forest succession of abandoned farmlands.
- Degradation of grassland bird habitat due to increased use of pesticides.

Management Recommendations

- Avoid disturbance of suitable habitat (e.g., mowing) during the breeding season, April 1 to August 15.
- Nesting fields should be mowed every 1-3 years, to provide grass that is 6-8" tall at time of spring arrival.
- To prevent succession, fields should be burned or cut back every 5-10 years after September 1 or before May 1.
- Reducing the use of pesticides can increase insect prey base.

This management summary is adapted from Houston and Bowen 2001, NYNHP 2008 and NatureServe 2008.

For additional information, see the following references:

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NYS BREEDING BIRD ATLAS COMPARATIVE DATA

