EASTERN MEADOWLARK (*Sturnella magna*) *GUIDANCE FOR CONSERVATION*

The Eastern Meadowlark is a declining breeder and uncommon migrant in hayfields and grasslands in the Hudson River Valley.

Eastern Meadowlarks use elevated perches for singing.

Conservation Status
Breeding Bird Survey data indicate a drastic decline in Eastern Meadowlark populations in New York since 1966. Partners in Flight lists this species as Regional Concern in Bird Conservation Regions13 and 28. New York Breeding Bird Atlas data show a significant reduction in distribution in the Hudson River Valley, particularly in the south.

Identification
This species, a member of the blackbird family, is a stocky, medium-sized bird, with a short tail. It has bright yellow underparts, a black v-shaped breast band, streaky brown upperparts, white outer tail feathers, long pinkish legs and a long, sharp-looking bill. It has a beautiful song consisting of a series of 2–8 pure, flutelike whistles, often slurred together and descending in pitch.

Habitat
It is most common in moderately tall grasslands and pastures, but also in hay and alfalfa fields, weedy borders of croplands, roadsides, orchards, golf courses, airports, shrubby overgrown fields, or other open areas. It must have elevated song perches, such as small trees, shrubs, or fence posts.

Food
It feeds mainly on insects and invertebrates including crickets, grasshoppers and worms, but it also eats berries and seeds. It forages on the ground, among vegetation, and by probing beneath the soil.

Nesting
The female starts several nests before choosing one to finish. The nest is situated in a small scrape on the ground or in a shallow depression and is well-hidden in dense vegetation. It is a cup with a dome-shaped roof interwoven with adjoining grasses with a side entrance. Nests are found in pastures, meadows, hay fields, or other grassland habitat, less often in cultivated fields.

Threats
•Loss of habitat due to development.
•Loss of habitat due to reforestation or succession from abandoned farmland into woodlots.
•Destruction of nests, young, and incubating adults due to mowing of hayfields during the breeding season and spring surface tillage for weed-control.
•Trampling of nests by livestock.
•Depredation of eggs and nestlings by foxes, domestic cats and dogs, coyotes, snakes, skunks, raccoons, or other small mammals.
•Although uncommon in the northeast, parasitization of nests by Brown-headed Cowbirds is a concern.

Management Recommendations

•Increase acreage of pasture, hay fields, and grasslands (50 acres or more is ideal), rather than several smaller fields, as predation by mammals and snakes and parasitism by Brown-headed Cowbirds are lower in large fields with more interior habitat than in small fields.

•Avoid disturbance of suitable habitat (e.g., mowing) during the breeding season, April 1 to end of July; ideally mowing should be done every 3–5 years.

•Maintain a variety of cover heights for feeding, loafing, roosting, and nesting; a rotational system of low intensity grazing helps to maintain diversity of cover height and density.

•Do not intensively graze, which tramples nests and vegetation and removes the vegetative cover hiding nests and discourages nesting and foraging (e.g., graze no more than 1 cow/per acres, and not rotationally).

•Limit the encroachment of woody vegetation into pastures, hayfields and other grasslands. Remove woody vegetation within and along the periphery of grassland fragments to discourage predators from using the woody vegetation as travel corridors and to enlarge the amount of interior grassland.

•Maintain a complex of burned and unburned habitats to provide a variety of grassland habitat types.

•Conduct prescribed burns in late spring on warm-season grasses to eliminate or reduce competition by cool-season grasses and weeds.

Grassland habitat in NY

Adapted from Lanyon 1995 and NatureServe 2008.

For additional information, see the following references:

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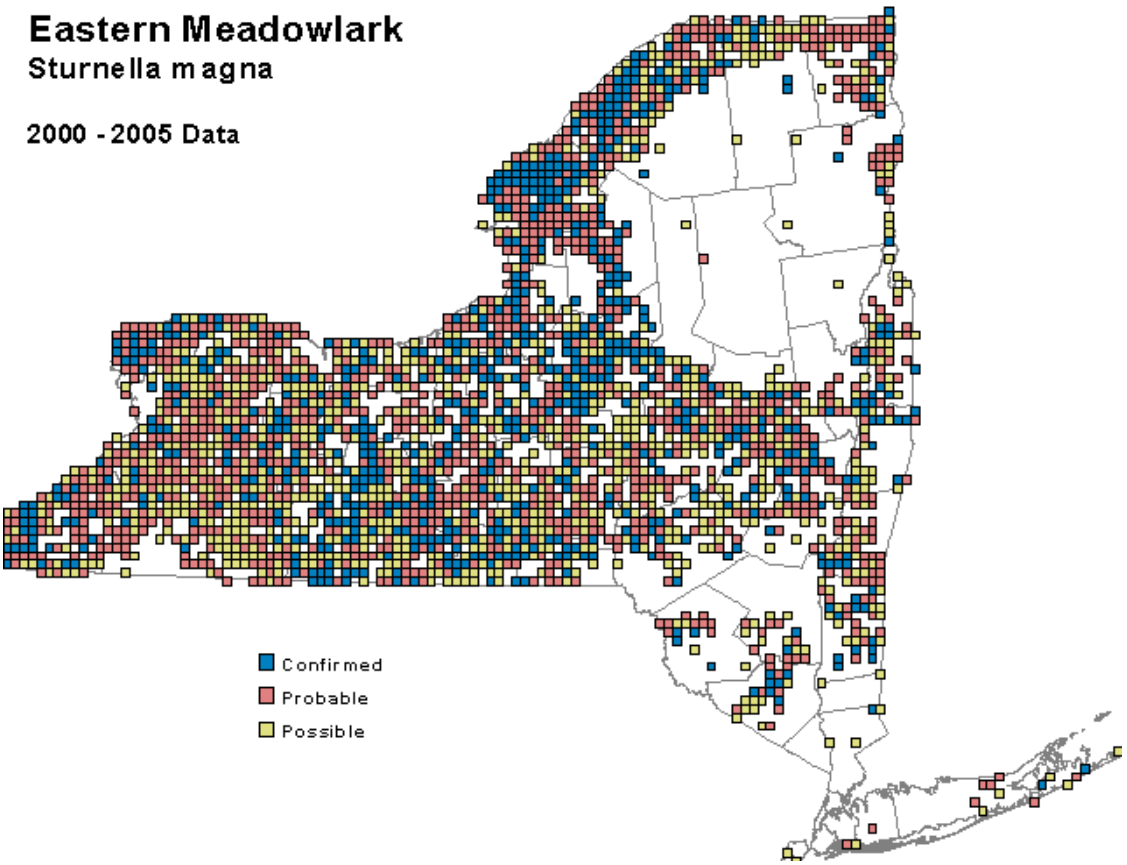
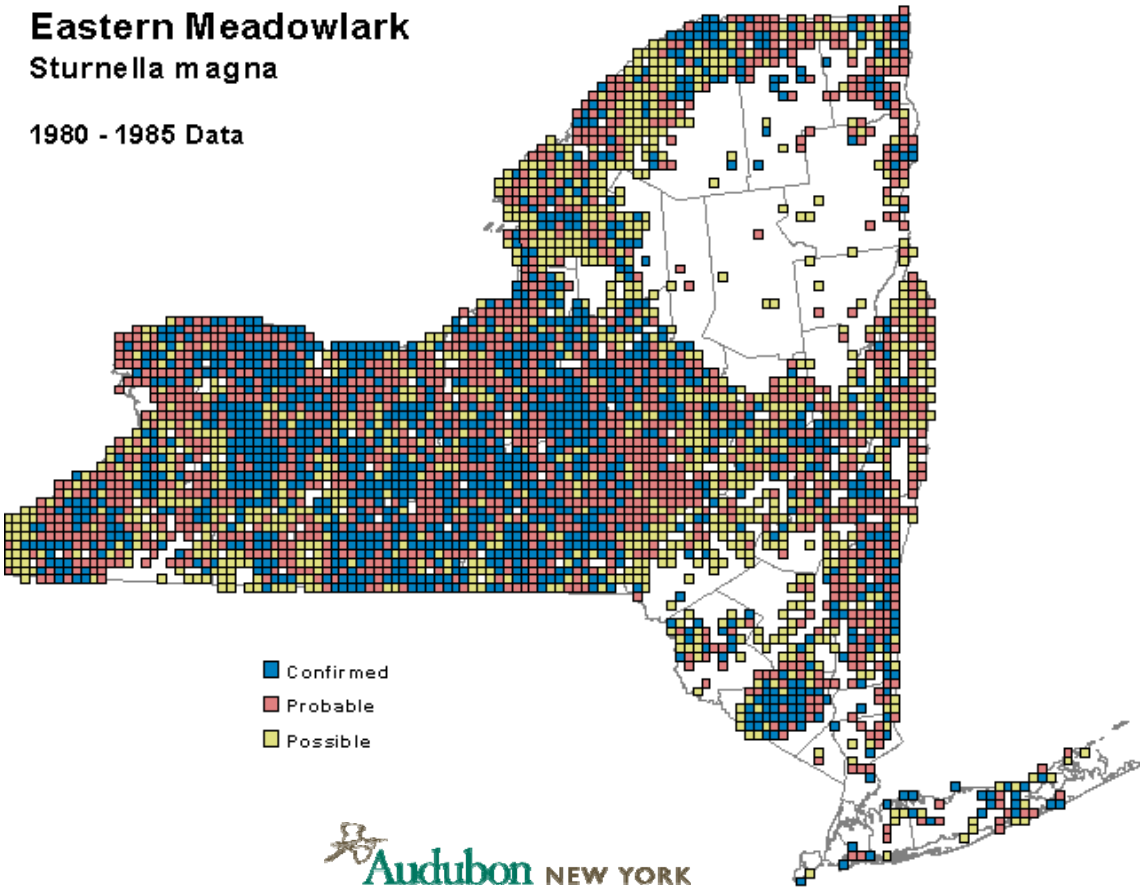
NYS BREEDING BIRD ATLAS COMPARATIVE DATA





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