

(*Passerculus sandwichensis*)

The Savannah Sparrow is a common breeder in grasslands in the northern part of the Hudson River Valley and less common in the south.

Conservation Status

Breeding Bird Survey data indicate a significant decline in New York's Savannah Sparrow population since 1966. However, the NYS Breeding Bird Atlas reflect a stable distribution in the Hudson River Valley. Partners in Flight lists the Savannah Sparrow as a Species of Regional Concern in Bird Conservation Region 13.

Identification

This species is small, with a short, notched tail. It has streaked, light brown upperparts and whitish underparts with streaking on the breast and sides. Its face has a yellow patch in front of and above the eye. Its bill is pale and its legs are pinkish. The song starts with two to five sharp "chip" notes, followed by two buzzing trills of different pitches, the first being longer, high-pitched and insect-like.



Savannah Sparrows do best in fields great than 20 acres.

Habitat

This bird breeds in open habitat with short to intermediate vegetation height (1-25"), intermediate vegetation density, and a well developed litter layer. This includes grasslands, lightly grazed pastures, cultivated fields (especially alfalfa), and moist sedge and grass meadows. It avoids areas with extensive tree cover, but often occurs in fields with some herbaceous plants or weeds. This species is highly sensitive to habitat fragmentation and needs fields from 20-40 acres in size.

Food

It feeds mainly on insects, such as beetles, grasshoppers, caterpillars, flies, and spiders. It also eats grass and weed seeds and some berries.

Nesting

The nest is located on the ground and is well-hidden among grass or weeds or placed under matted dead plants or a canopy of dead grasses and herbs. It is an open cup made of grass that is approached through a tunnel from the side. Preferred nest sites include shallow depressions formed by birds in grass clumps or occurring naturally in the ground among goldenrods or at the base of low woody shrubs such as blueberry, raspberry, blackberry or wild rose. A pair's territory size is 1-2 acres.

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Threats

- Loss of habitat from suburban development.
- Reforestation of grasslands and pastures.
- Conversion of grasslands and pastures to row crops.
- Nest destruction due to early mowing.
- Nest parasitism by Brown-headed Cowbirds.
- Predation by snakes, skunks, raccoons, and feral cats.

Management Recommendations

- Promote management or enhancement activities that increase the amount of contiguous grassland habitat.
- Remove woody vegetation along the edges of grassland fragments to discourage predators that may use woody vegetation as travel corridors
- Maintain grassy and open field areas by conducting rotational mowing or managed grazing.
- Avoid disturbance of suitable habitat during the breeding season, April 1 to August 15.



Grassland habitat in NY

This management summary was adapted from Swainson 2003 and Wheelwright and Rising 1993.

For additional information, see the following references:

NatureServe. 2008. NatureServe Explorer: An online encyclopedia of life [web application]. Version 7.0. NatureServe, Arlington, VA. <http://www.natureserve.org/explorer>.

Swainson, D. A. 2003. Effects of Management Practices on Grassland Birds: Savannah Sparrow. Northern Prairie Wildlife Research Center, James, ND. Northern Prairie Wildlife Research Center Online: <http://www.npwr.usgs.gov/resource/litertr/grasbird/savs/savs.htm>.

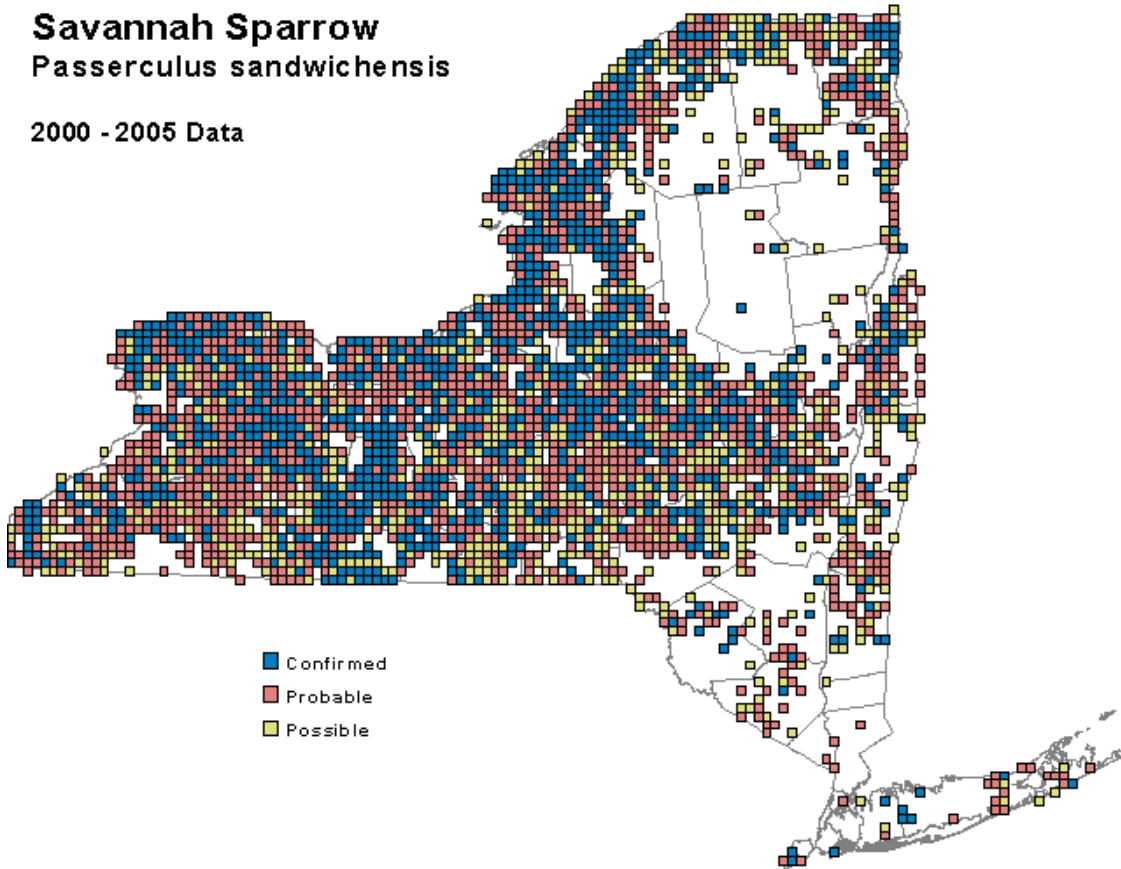
Wheelwright, N. T. and J. D. Rising. 1993. Savannah Sparrow (*Passerculus sandwichensis*), The Birds of North America Online (A. Poole, ed.). Ithaca: Cornell Lab of Ornithology; Retrieved from the Birds of North America Online: <http://bna.birds.cornell.edu/bna/species/045>

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NYS BREEDING BIRD ATLAS COMPARATIVE DATA

Savannah Sparrow
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2000 - 2005 Data



Savannah Sparrow
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1980 - 1985 Data

