Species Status Assessment

Common Name: Upland sandpiper **Date Updated:** March 2025

Scientific Name: *Bartramia longicauda* **Updated By:** Abigail Valachovic

Class: Aves

Family: Scolopacidae

Species Synopsis *(a short paragraph which describes species taxonomy, distribution, recent trends, and habitat in New York):*

The upland sandpiper breeds primarily in the Great Plains region of the United States and Canada, with populations extending sparsely eastward to the Northeast. It is listed as Threatened or Endangered in 10 northeastern states. In New York, Upland sandpiper is listed as Threatened and is among the rarest of grassland birds, second only to the Henslow's sparrow. The second Breeding Bird Atlas in New York documented a 65% decline in occupancy in the past 20 years; the number of survey blocks with confirmed breeding declined by 73%. In New York, the cumulative change in estimated relative abundance from 2012 through 2022 of Upland sandpipers during the breeding season has decreased by 67.2% with confidence intervals of –56.3% to –75.6%.

Changes in farming practices, development, and reforestation are responsible for the steady decline in the Northeast. Upland sandpipers have adapted their habitat requirements to utilize airports, reclaimed mine lands, capped landfills, and other human-made landscapes, suggesting that recovery potential is promising if suitable nesting and brood-rearing habitat is managed and increased.

I. Status

a. Current legal protected Status

i. **Federal:** Not Listed **Candidate:** No

ii. **New York:** Threatened: SGCN

b. Natural Heritage Program

i. **Global:** G5

ii. **New York:** S3B **Tracked by NYNHP?:** Yes, on tracking list

Other Ranks:

Proposed NYS 2025 SGCN status: High Priority Species of Greatest Conservation Need
COSEWIC: Not listed in Canada

Partners in Flight – Rank IIA out of 20
IUCN Red List Category: LC - Least concern

U.S. Shorebird Conservation Plan – Species of High Concern

Species of Northeast Regional Conservation Concern (Therres 1999) : Watchlist [Defer to MAFWA]

Nature Serve listed the Upland sandpiper as secured (2014).

Status Discussion:

In New York the Upland sandpiper is a widespread but uncommon breeder. It is a rare to common migrant, especially inland in the fall. Upland sandpiper is ranked as Threatened in New York, Pennsylvania, and Vermont. It is ranked as Endangered in Connecticut, Massachusetts, and New Jersey.

II. Abundance and Distribution Trends

Region	Present?	Abundance	Distribution	Time Frame	Listing status	SGCN?
North America	Yes	Increasing	Unknown	BBS 1966-2022 trend for US		Yes
Northeastern US	Yes	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown		No
New York	Yes	Declining	Declining	BBS 1966-2022	T	Yes
Connecticut	Yes	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown	E	Yes
Massachusetts	Yes	Unknown	Declining	Since 1980	E	Yes
New Jersey	Yes	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown	E	Yes
Pennsylvania	Yes	Declining	Declining	BBS 1966-2022 not credible trend	E	Yes
Vermont	Yes	Unknown	Declining	BBS 1966-2022 not credible trend	E	Yes
Ontario	Yes	Declining	Unknown	BBS 1966-2022 trend	NL, S2B	No
Quebec	Yes	Declining	Unknown	BBS 1966-2022 trend	NL, S3B	No

Column options
Present?: Yes; No; Unknown; No data; (blank) or Choose an Item
Abundance and Distribution: Declining; Increasing; Stable; Unknown; Extirpated; N/A; (blank) or Choose an item
SGCN?: Yes; No; Unknown; (blank) or Choose an item

Monitoring in New York *(specify any monitoring activities or regular surveys that are conducted in New York):*

New York's Landowner Incentive Program (LIP) monitors grassland birds at eight Grassland Focus Areas in the state. Upland sandpiper is one of the focal species in point counts that are conducted annually. In 2005, Audubon NY conducted grassland bird surveys within the New York grassland bird focus areas to help identify target species for each focus area. As a follow up to these surveys, in 2006 NYSDEC did targeted surveys for species that were not well represented in the 2005 survey. Upland sandpiper was one of the primary species targeted during both of these survey efforts.

Trends Discussion *(insert map of North American/regional distribution and status):*

Upland sandpiper was hunted extensively before the passage of the Migratory Bird Treaty Act in 1918. From 1870 to 1890, between 50,000 and 60,000 birds were shipped annually by train from Nebraska (Dinsmore 1994).

As an obligate grassland species, the Upland sandpiper has declined in the Northeast and in New York over the past 50 years as habitat has been lost to reforestation. Breeding Bird Survey data for New York show a declining long-term (1966-2010) and short-term (2000-2010) trend of -5.3% per year; while both trends are significant, caution is advised due to low relative abundance. The second Breeding Bird Atlas documented a -65% decline in occupancy from 1980-85 to 2000-05; the number of blocks in which breeding was confirmed declined by -73%

In North America, Breeding Bird Survey data show a significant long-term increase of 0.5% per year from 1966 to 2010, and a non-significant short-term increase of 1.2% per year from 2000 to 2010. In the Lower Great Lakes/St. Lawrence Plain BCR, the BBS trend is significantly declining at -2.9% per year for 1966 to 2010 and at -3.4% per year from 2000 to 2010.

Most recently, Breeding Bird Survey data for New York show a declining long-term (1993-2019) trend of -7.59%. The species has been roughly stable between 1970 and 2017 (Partners in Flight 2020). Short-term trends suggest that the population increased by 13% over the past three generations (12.3 years), although this value is statistically non-significant (Pardieck et al. 2018; see also Wetlands International 2020). In New York, the cumulative change in estimated relative abundance from 2012 through 2022 of Upland sandpipers during the breeding season has decreased by 67.2% with confidence intervals of –56.3% to –75.6%.

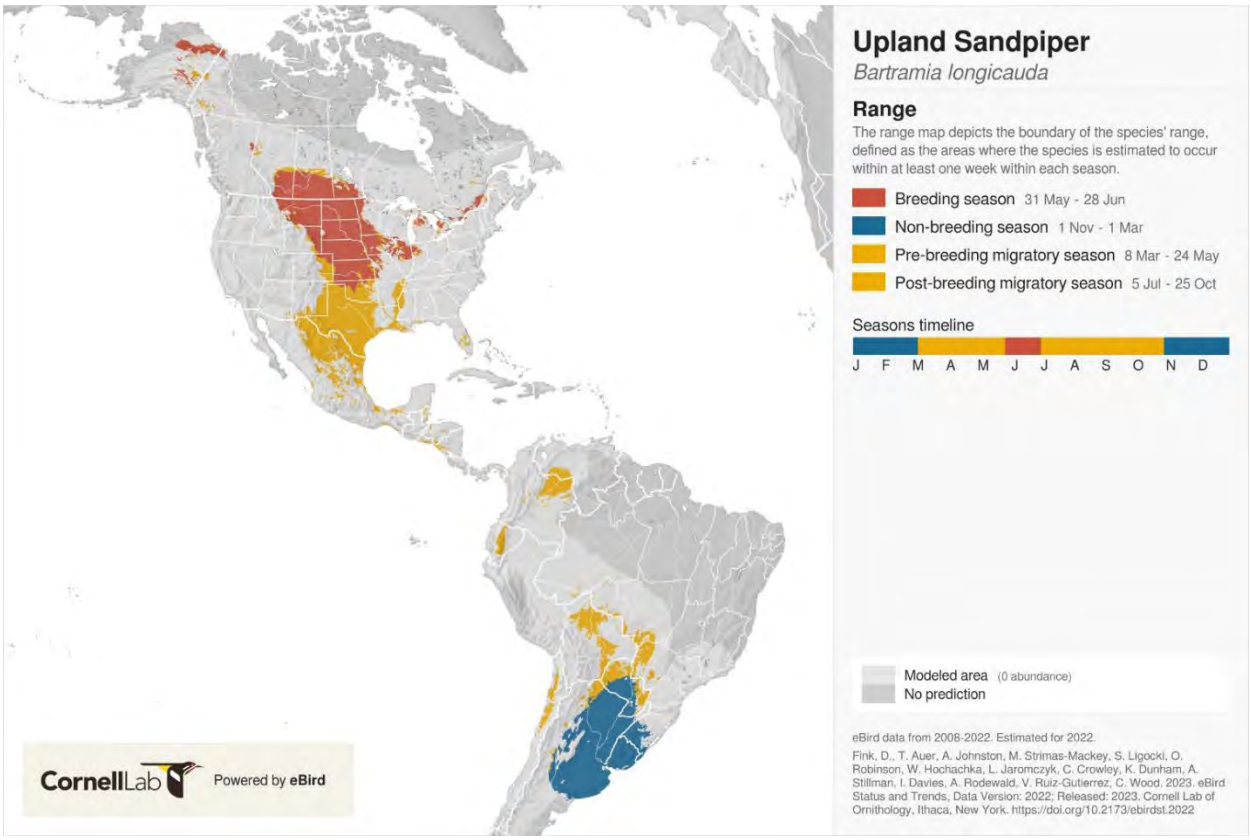

Figure 1. Upland sandpiper distribution in North America (Source: eBird).

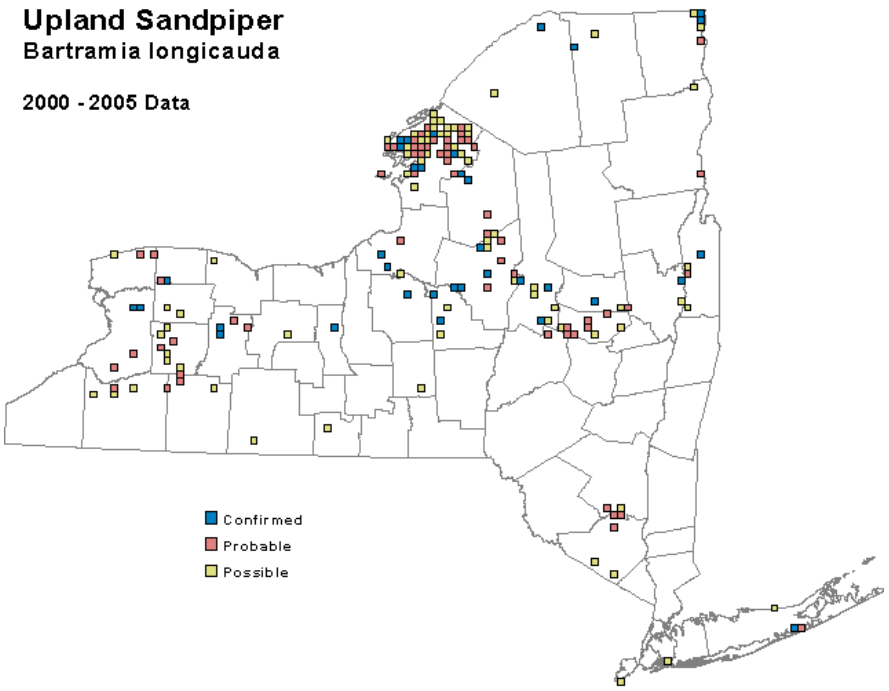

Figure 2. Upland sandpiper occurrence in New York State during the second Breeding Bird Atlas (McGowan and Corwin 2008).

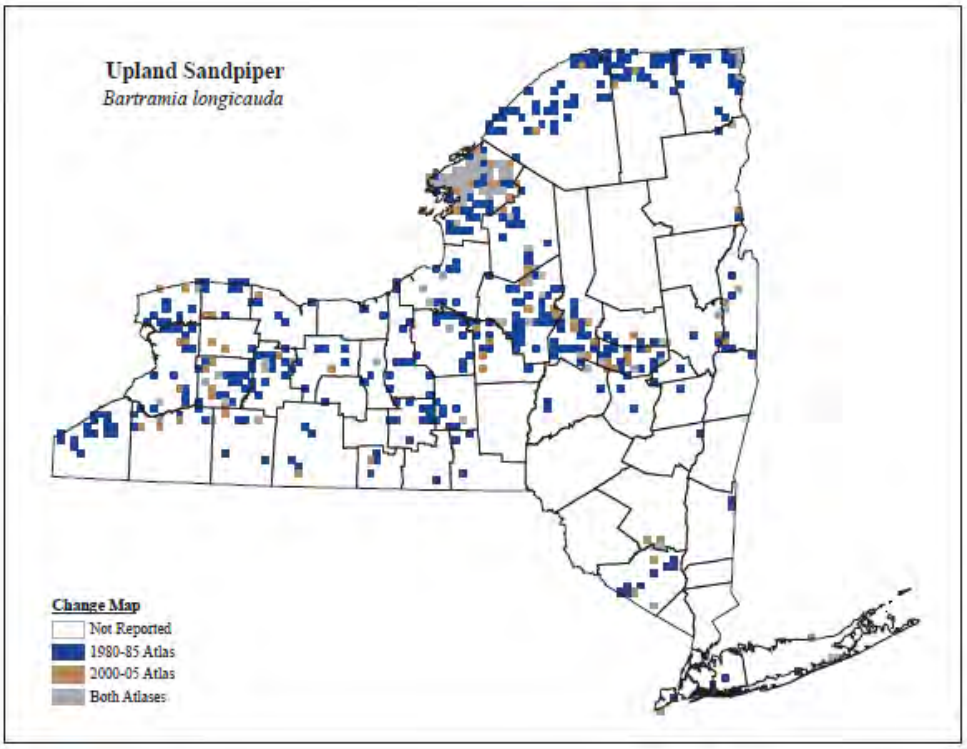

Figure 3. Change in upland sandpiper occurrence in New York State between the first Breeding Bird Atlas and the second Breeding Bird Atlas (McGowan and Corwin 2008).

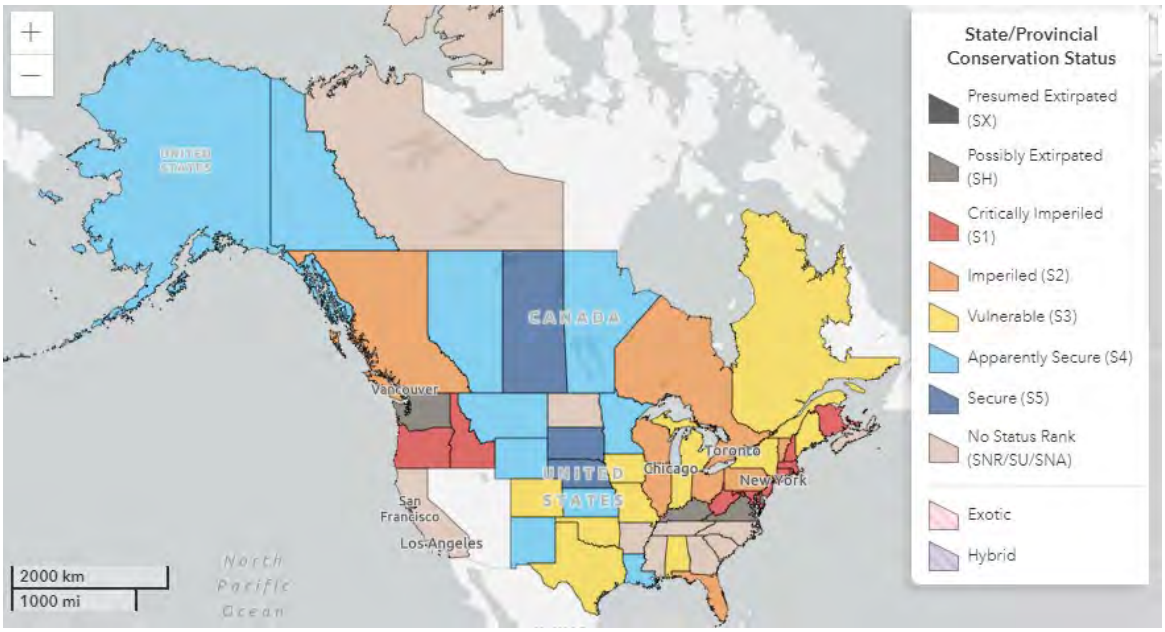

Figure 4. Conservation status of the Upland sandpiper in North America (NatureServe 2014).

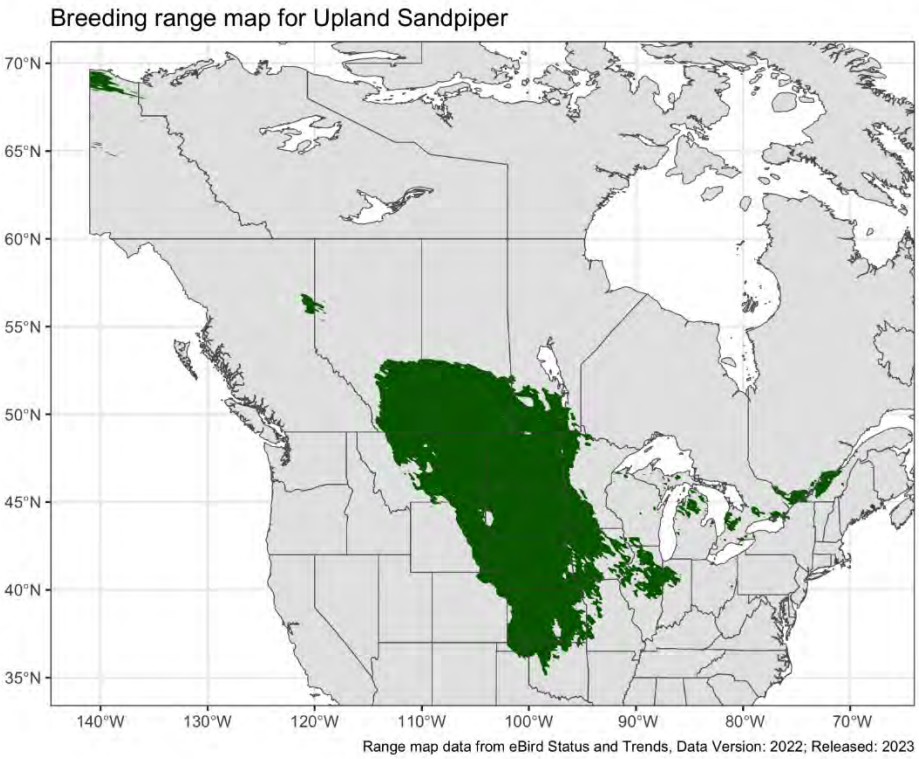

Figure 5. Breeding range for upland sandpiper. Data source is eBird.

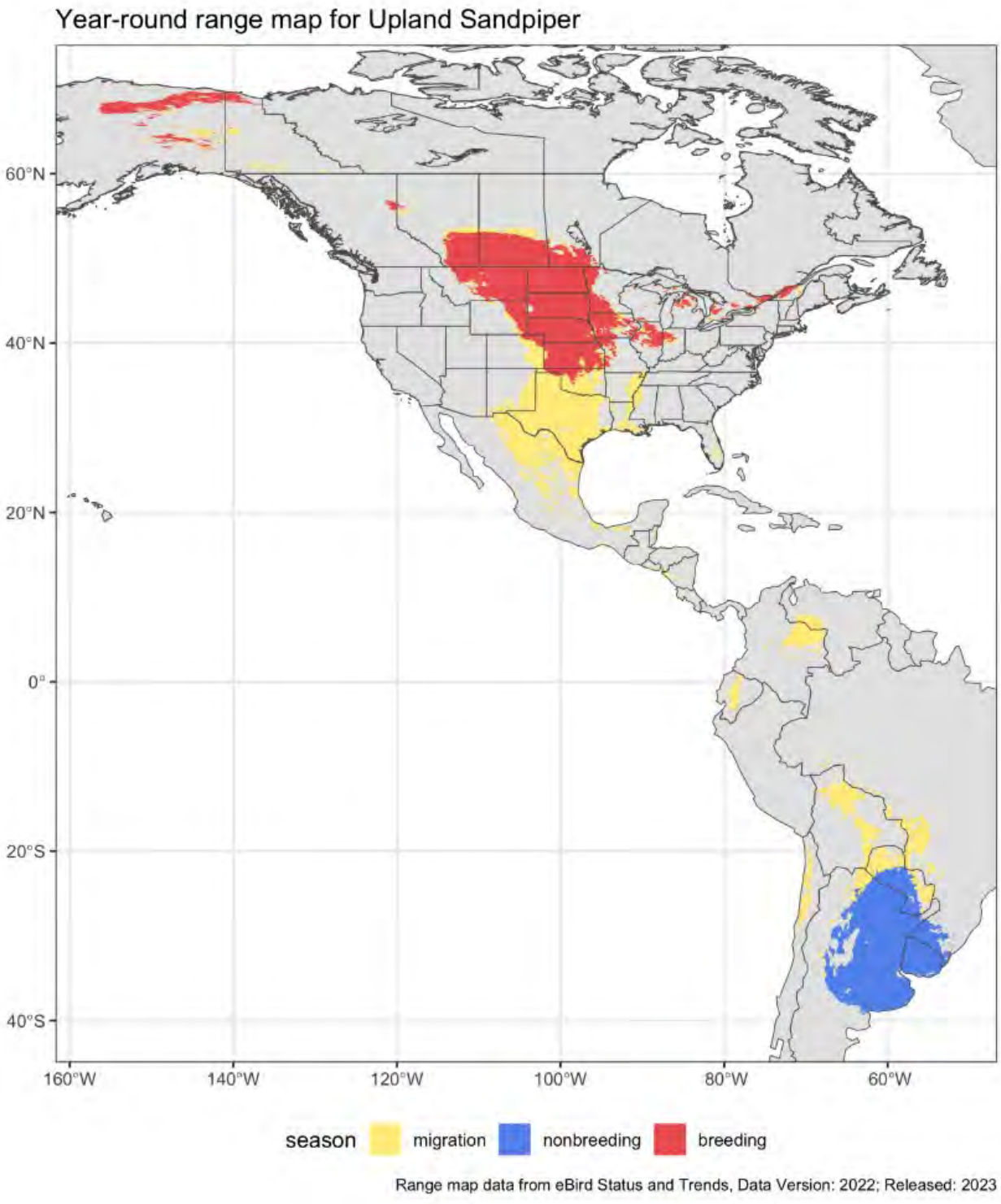

Figure 6. Full (year- round) range for upland sandpiper. Data source is eBird.

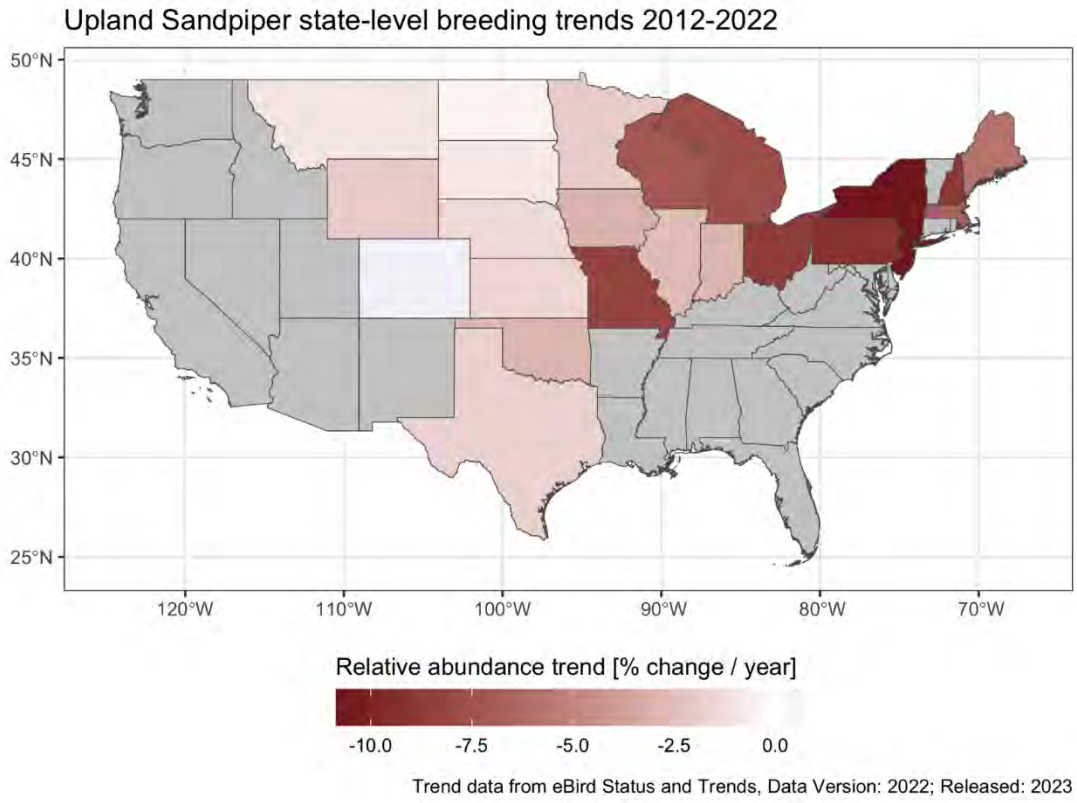

Figure 7: Trends, by state, for upland sandpiper. Data source is eBird.

III. New York Rarity

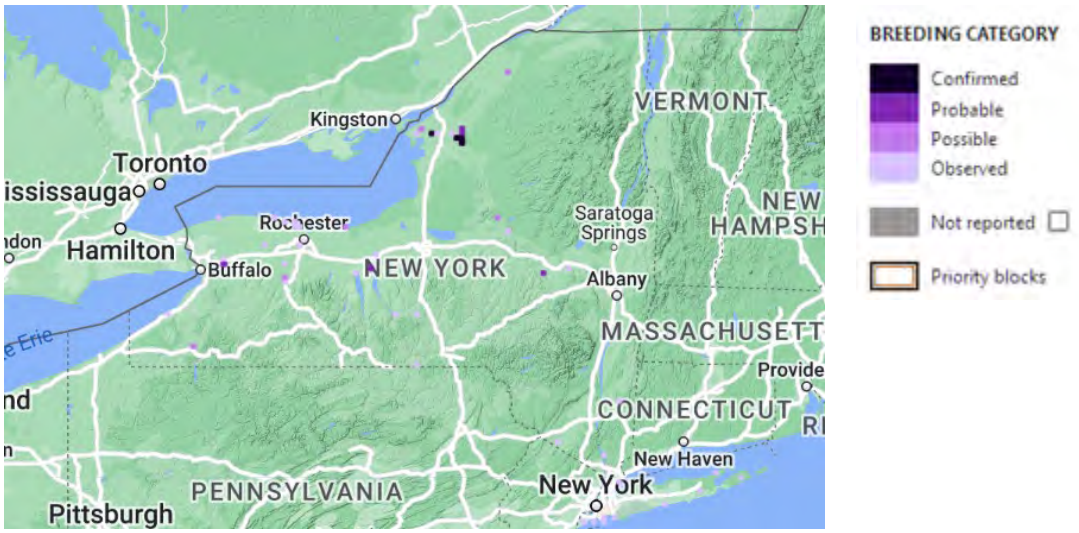

Figure 8. Breeding Bird Atlas 3 records of upland sandpiper in New York (BBA-eBird).

Details of historic and current occurrence:

Bull (1974) noted Upland sandpiper as declining, but still locally common in agricultural areas, despite its disappearance from Long Island. The first Breeding Bird Atlas (1980-85) documented

occupancy in 476 survey blocks statewide, 8.9% of the survey blocks statewide (Andrle and Carroll 1988). The second BBA (2000-05) documented occupancy in 165 blocks, 3.1% of the survey blocks statewide, a decline of 65% (McGowan and Corwin 2008).

The third BBA (2020-25) is currently underway and utilizes a different number and layout of survey blocks across New York, making direct comparison with the first two Atlases difficult. There were 5,333 blocks in the first and second BBAs, and there are 5,710 blocks in the current BBA, of which 1,815 are considered priority blocks. To date, upland sandpiper has been documented in 16 priority blocks, 0.2% of all priority blocks statewide during the third BBA (NY BBA III Overview, 2024)

New York's Contribution to Species North American Range:

Percent of North American Range in NY	Classification of NY Range	Distance to core population, if not in NY
1-25%	Peripheral	Since 1970s

Column options
Percent of North American Range in NY: 100% (endemic); 76-99%; 51-75%; 26-50%; 1-25%; 0%; Choose an item
Classification of NY Range: Core; Peripheral; Disjunct; (blank) or Choose an item

IV. Primary Habitat or Community Type *(from NY crosswalk of NE Aquatic, Marine, or Terrestrial Habitat Classification Systems):*

1. Pasture/Hay
2. Urban and Recreational Grasses
3. Native Barrens and Savanna
4. Old Field Managed Grasslands

NatureServe broad habitat types: Old field, Grassland/herbaceous, Cropland/hedgerow, Bog/fen

NY Natural Heritage Communities: Cropland/field crops, Hempstead Plains grassland, Pastureland, Successional old field

Habitat or Community Type Trend in New York

Habitat Specialist?	Indicator Species?	Habitat/ Community Trend	Time frame of Decline/Increase
Yes	Yes	Declining	

Column options
Habitat Specialist and Indicator Species: Yes; No; Unknown; (blank) or Choose an item
Habitat/Community Trend: Declining; Stable; Increasing; Unknown; (blank) or Choose an item

Habitat Discussion:

Upland sandpiper's association with the native prairie is so strong that scientists consider it to be an indicator species, that can indicate the quality of a habitat. Thus, the absence of the UPSA in a patch of prairie would indicate to biologists that there is likely a problem with the habitat. A survey of nesting habitats in Wisconsin (White 1983) suggested that Upland Sandpipers favor a level topography with a minimum of tall vegetation edges and proportionately high acreages of agricultural crops that duplicate the structure of prairie grasslands. Preferred habitat includes large areas of short grass for feeding and

courtship with interspersed or adjacent taller grasses for nesting and brood cover. In the northeastern U.S., airfields currently provide the majority of suitable habitat, though grazed pastures and grassy fields also are used (Carter 1992). Observations by Buss and Hawkins (1939) suggest a delicate distinction between acceptable and unacceptable sites. Heavy or early grazing, standing water, burning, and manuring may reduce or exclude nesting from fields accepted the previous year. Abandoned fields with invading shrubs and trees may sometimes exclude Upland Sandpipers (Laughlin and Kibbe 1985). In upstate New York, Bollinger (1995) found that Upland Sandpipers preferred larger, older hayfields (> 10 years). Habitat characteristics specific to New York include field size > 30 ha, < 1% shrub cover, 10-15% forb cover, very low litter depth, mixed vegetation height (<15 cm & 40 cm+), sparse overall vegetation density, with available perches (Morgan and Burger 2006). In Jefferson County, Lazazzero and Norment (2005) found that Upland Sandpipers favored large pastures with small perimeter/area ratios (fewer edges) that are homogenous in floristic structure (few plant species) with nearby barns and fenceposts for perching. Upland Sandpiper probability of occurrence continued to increase even at the largest field size (> 500 ha), indicating that smaller fields, even with the appropriate mosaic of vegetation elements, will unlikely be used for breeding by this species.

BREEDING:

In New York, breeding occurs in agricultural areas including old pastures and hayfields (Bull 1974). In most areas of New York where upland sandpiper is persisting where farming techniques remain less intensive. Upland sandpipers can also be found in mowed areas adjacent to airport runways and highways. Airfields appear to be an especially hopeful avenue for providing upland sandpiper habitat.

Restricted primarily to extensive, open tracts of short grassland habitat. Nest in native prairie, dry meadows, pastures, domestic hayfields, short-grass savanna, plowed fields, along highway rights-of-way and on airfields, and (in the north) peatlands and scattered woodlands near timberline (Forbush 1925, Higgins et al. 1969, AOU 1983, Osborne and Peterson 1984, Godfrey 1986). Nesting is also known to occur in dry patches of wet meadows (Stewart 1975, Herman et al. 1984) and in blueberry (VACCINIUM spp.) barrens (J. Albright, pers. comm.). A survey of nesting habitats in Wisconsin (White 1983) suggests that upland sandpipers favor a level topography with a minimum of tall vegetation edges and proportionately high acreages of agricultural crops which duplicate prairie grasslands in terms of structure. Preferred habitat includes large areas of short grass for feeding and courtship with interspersed or adjacent taller grasses for nesting and brood cover; in the northeastern U.S., airfields currently provide the majority of suitable habitat, though grazed pastures and grassy fields also are used (Carter 1992). Nests on ground among grasses; sometimes along prairie sloughs (Terres 1980).

Agricultural land use patterns and farming practices influence the choice of nesting sites. In central Wisconsin, Ailes (1980) found that idle fields and hayfields accounted for the majority of nesting habitats. Upland sandpipers accept a variety of native and introduced grasses (Buss and Hawkins 1939). Timothy (PHLEUM spp.), bluegrass (POA spp.), needlegrass (STIPA spp.), bluestem (ANDROPOGON spp.), quackgrass (AGROPYRON spp.), Junegrass (KOELERA spp.), and bromegrass (BROMUS spp.) are among the grasses associated with nesting fields (Buss and Hawkins 1939, Meanley 1943, Buss 1951, Higgins et al. 1969, Kirsch and Higgins 1976, Ailes 1980). NON-BREEDING: Very rarely in migration along shores and mudflats (AOU 1983). Changes in land use and agricultural practices may be critical to the limited numbers (White 1988). Upland sandpipers possibly prefer the drier climate and planted grasses to historically utilized wetter, native grasslands found farther south and southeast (White 1988).

V. Species Demographic, and Life History:

Breeder in NY?	Non-breeder in NY?	Migratory Only?	Summer Resident?	Winter Resident?	Anadromous/ Catadromous?
Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	(blank)

Column options
First 5 fields: Yes; No; Unknown; (blank) or Choose an item
Anadromous/Catadromous: Anadromous; Catadromous; (blank) or Choose an item

Species Demographics and Life History Discussion *(include information about species life span, reproductive longevity, reproductive capacity, age to maturity, and ability to disperse and colonize):*

The age at first breeding and intervals between breeding events are not known. Reproductive success appears to be higher than other ground-nesting shorebirds. There are few data on survival. The two longest survivors among banding recoveries were five years (Clapp et al. 1982), and 8 years, 11 months (Houston et al. 1999). One brood is reared per season. There are no data on lifetime reproductive success. Data on reproductive success are sparse; mortality of flightless young is relatively high, but difficult to measure because young hide and are rarely seen.
In Kansas, from 2002 through 2005, Mong and Sandercock (2007) radio-marked 184 upland sandpipers, and color-banded an additional 138 birds. Annual return rates ranged from 20-50% over the study period.

Tend to be loosely colonial while breeding (Bowen 1976), often occupying the same nesting fields in successive years (Buss and Hawkins 1939, Ailes 1980). Density varies from 0.6-6.1 ha/nest in loosely spaced “colonies” (Harrison 1979). Nest territories are generally grouped and consist of a nesting site, plus a loafing and feeding area near or adjacent to the nest territory which is shared communally (Buss and Hawkins 1939). In the central portion of the range in North Dakota, breeding densities of up to 20 pairs/mi squared (2.59/km squared) have been recorded (Stewart and Kantrud 1972). Limited studies on home ranges of breeding birds; in Wisconsin, one female occupied 85.6 hectares and one male occupied only 8.5 hectares (Ailes and Toepfer 1977). Studies by Bowen (1976) and Ailes (1980) suggest that adults may exhibit some degree of site faithfulness, although Ailes (1980) found that none of the 61 young he banded returned to their natal grounds the following year. In nonbreeding season, solitary or in small scattered groups.

VI. Threats *(from NY 2015 SWAP or newly described):*

The greatest threat to Upland sandpipers is the loss of suitable habitat. This species is area-sensitive, requiring large expanses of grasslands, therefore fragmentation of habitat, as well as outright habitat loss, is a significant threat.

Declines are associated with plowing of natural grasslands (Houston and Bowen 2001). At present, loss, degradation, and fragmentation of habitat due to increased urbanization, changes in farming practices and natural forest succession pose the most serious threats to populations. Frequent disturbance of pastures and hayfields (cut too often to allow breeding) is a problem in some areas. Extensive row-cropping and early crop-cutting probably pose threats to breeders (Byrd and Johnston 1991).

A study led by a Canadian toxicologist identified acutely toxic pesticides as the most likely leading cause of the widespread decline in grassland bird numbers in the United States. Overall, insecticide use, and change in permanent pasture and rangeland, concluded that lethal pesticides were nearly four times more likely to be associated with population declines than the next most likely contributor, changes in cropped pasture (Mineau and Whiteside 2013).

In an assessment of vulnerability to predicted climate change conducted by the New York Natural Heritage Program, upland sandpiper was identified as a second-priority species whose sensitivity should be assessed in the future (Schlesinger et al. 2011).

Threat Level 1	Threat Level 2	Threat Level 3	Spatial Extent	Severity	Immediacy	Trend	Certainty
1. Residential and Commercial	1.1 Housing & Urban Areas	-					
2. Agriculture & Aquaculture	2.1 Annual & Perennial Non-Timber Crops	2.1.1 Annual cropping systems (field crops)					
4. Transportation & Service Corridors	4.1 Roads & Railroads	4.1.1 Roads					
4. Transportation & Service Corridors	4.1 Roads & Railroads	4.1.2 Railroads					
9. Pollution	9.3 Agricultural & Forestry Effluents	-					
7. Natural System Modifications	7.3 Other Ecosystem Modifications	-					
3. Energy Production & Mining	3.3 Renewable Energy	3.3.4 Solar farms					
8. Invasive & Other Problematic Species	8.1 Invasive Non-Native Plants & Animals	-					
11. Climate Change	11.3 Changes in Temperature Regimes	11.3.1 Heat waves					

Table 1. Threats to Upland sandpiper

Are there regulatory mechanisms that protect the species or its habitat in New York?

Yes:	✓	No:	Unknown:

If yes, describe mechanism and whether adequate to protect species/habitat:

The upland sandpiper is listed as a threatened species in New York and is protected by Environmental Conservation Law (ECL) section 11-0535 and the New York Code of Rules and Regulations (6 NYCRR Part 182). A permit is required for any proposed project that may result in a take of a species listed as Threatened or Endangered, including, but not limited to, actions that may kill or harm individual animals or result in the adverse modification, degradation or destruction of habitat occupied by the listed species. Upland sandpiper is also protected under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act.

Describe knowledge of management/conservation actions that are needed for recovery/conservation, or to eliminate, minimize, or compensate for the identified threats:

Grassland birds in New York will benefit from habitat management on private lands under programs such as New York's Landowner Incentive Program (LIP) for Grassland Protection and Management. The program provides incentives and technical advice to private landowners to enhance grassland habitat by following recommended mowing schedules and by removing trees, shrubs, and hedgerows. Increasing the LIP acreage in pasture or short grass habitats would be beneficial for upland sandpiper.

The NYSDEC's Strategy for Grassland Bird Conservation Best Management Practices (BMPs) for should be used to guide habitat management on grassland habitat or habitat to be converted into grassland. The management goal of these BMPs is to maintain the open, grassy conditions necessary for successful breeding by grassland birds and to avoid disturbance to nesting birds. Techniques may include seeding, mowing, and removal of trees and shrubs including invasive species. Typically, land should be managed for a minimum of 5 years to begin showing benefits for grassland birds. These BMPs form the basis for specific 5-year Site Management Plans for landowners selected to receive technical and financial assistance through LIP (NYSDEC 2022-2027).

Because the vast majority of remaining grassland habitat is privately owned, private lands incentive programs and educational programs should be a major component of the conservation effort. Protection of existing habitat for threatened and endangered species through enforcement of regulations pertaining to the taking of habitat is also a critical component of the conservation effort for these species (Morgan and Burger 2008).

Morgan and Burger (2008) recommend that further research is needed:

1. Methods and data for modeling distributions and abundance of grassland landcover across the landscape.

2. Impacts of management on productivity of grassland birds, to amplify existing information on grassland bird abundances associated with management.

3. Potential benefits of native grass species as grassland habitat in contrast with demonstrated benefit of non-native cool season grasses.

Some general recommendations:

·Target management for grassland bird species known to be in the vicinity and consider the needs of both breeding and wintering grassland bird species.
· Consider the surrounding landscape when making management decisions.
· Conduct baseline grassland bird surveys on newly acquired fields or fields targeted for management changes to determine which species are present.
· Increase field size by hedgerow removal, removing trees, etc. to benefit species that require large, open fields.
· Control invasive plant species (glossy buckthorn, pale and black swallowwort, Canada thistle, Phragmites, etc.) to improve habitat quality.
· When developing grassland planting or habitat restoration projects, consider a variety of factors including the targeted grassland bird species, pollinators, seed mix (warm versus cool season grasses, forbs, wildflower mixes, grass height and density), timing of planting, existing site conditions, and vegetation removal techniques (including herbicide and intensive disking).
· Utilize mowing, haying, burning, and grazing for maintaining grassland habitat, after evaluating the appropriateness of these methods relative to site conditions and management objectives. In particular, burning cool season grasses is not advisable in most situations in New York.

Conservation actions following IUCN taxonomy are categorized in the table below.

Action Category	Action	Description
B.3 Outreach	B.3.1.3 Targeted Communication	Educate agricultural/private landowners on grassland management
B.4 Law Enforcement and Prosecution	B.4.2 Prosecution and conviction	Enforce policies, guidelines, and regulations for migratory birds
A.1 Direct Habitat Management	A.1.1 Manage plants	Mechanical, biological, and chemical management (ie invasive grassland species)
C.6 Design and Plan Conservation	C.6.2 Conserve specific land or seascapes	Land acquisition and/or easement
C.6 Design and Plan Conservation	C.6.5 Conservation Planning	Develop a conservation, management, or restoration plan for protected private lands or private landowner
A.1 Direct Habitat Management	A.1.1.2.1 Planting	Cool and warm season grass restoration/planting

Action Category	Action	Description
C.8 Research and Monitoring	C.8.1 Basic research and status monitoring	Monitoring threats (ie renewable energy) and population demographics in the field

Table 3. Recommended conservation actions for upland sandpiper

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