CURRENT STATUS: In Pennsylvania, the upland sandpiper is listed as threatened and protected under the Game and Wildlife Code. Although not list as endangered or threatened at the federal level, the upland sandpiper is listed as Partners in Flight North American Landbird Conservation Plan priority grassland species; a U.S. Waterbird Conservation Plan priority species; and a U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Migratory Bird of Conservation Concern in the Northeast. All migratory birds are protected under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act of 1918.

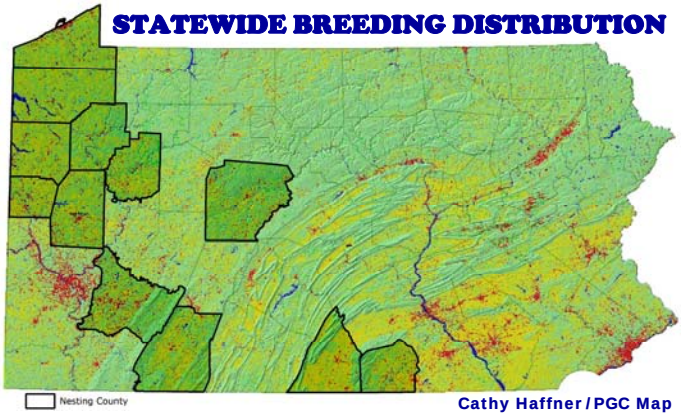
POPULATION TREND: Upland sandpipers (*Bartramia longicauda*) are rare breeding birds with scattered nesting sites, mostly in the state's west and central regions. Only two confirmed breeding blocks were located during the 2nd Pennsylvania Breeding Bird Atlas (2004-2008), in Butler and Lawrence Counties, versus 21 confirmed breeding blocks in the 1st Breeding Bird Atlas (1983-1989). They are common breeders in the Great Plains states of the Midwest, where grasslands are larger and more prevalent.

This species has experienced dramatic population changes in Pennsylvania over the past 150 years. Their nesting population increased with deforestation in the 1800s, and then gradually decreased as pesticides and changes in farming practices increased in the 1900s. It was considered common to abundant in the farming country of southeastern Pennsylvania in the early nineteenth century. They have disappeared from the eastern third of the state and are now found primarily on reclaimed strip mines. Upland sandpipers were listed as threatened in 1985. Because of a precipitous decline over two decades that diminished its breeding range and increased its rarity, the upland sandpiper's status in Pennsylvania was downgraded from threatened to endangered in 2012.

IDENTIFYING CHARACTERISTICS: The upland sandpiper, formerly called the upland plover, is a large, light-brown shorebird. It is about 12 inches tall and has a 20-inch wingspan. The upland sandpiper can be identified by its long neck, disproportionately small head, and long tail. Its back and wings are dark brown; breast streaked. The upland sandpiper is perhaps most readily identified by its preference for perching on wires and fenceposts, and its habit of holding its wings high above its back for a few moments after alighting and then gracefully folding its wings and disappearing into the grass. An upland sandpiper perched gracefully on top of a fencepost is a classic image of the American prairie. This species is not easily confused with other shorebirds because of its habitat and size. Its voice is a characteristic and enchanting sound of North American grasslands. The most distinctive vocalization is a far-carrying, ethereal whistle described by some as a mellow, mournful and upwardly trilling. Others describe it as sounding somewhat like the "wolf whistle" playfully offered by humans. Nonetheless, it is distinct and, once learned, perhaps the best first clue that an upland sandpiper is nearby.

BIOLOGY-NATURAL HISTORY: Although upland sandpipers are classified as shorebirds, this species does not frequent shorelines. This species requires grasslands rather than coastal areas to survive. This elegant sandpiper has been described by some as a quintessential species of grasslands. They are more likely to be found in fields 150 acres or larger than in smaller fields. Upland sandpipers nest across the

northern states and in Canadian provinces. They winter in South America, particularly the pampas of Argentina.



Cathy Haffner / PGC Map

These birds arrive in Pennsylvania in April and leave in July or August following the nesting season. The female lays a typical four-egg clutch on the ground in tall grasses. Both adults incubate the eggs and raise the chicks, although the female may depart for wintering areas before the male. Young hatch in about three weeks, and they leave the nest as soon as the last one hatches. Whereas nests sites are located in tall grass, adults and chicks use low vegetation — including mowed areas — for feeding. Juveniles take short flights at 18 days old and leave the nesting area at about 30 days of age. They are almost exclusively insectivorous, feeding primarily on grasshoppers, crickets and weevils. For this reason, upland sandpipers can be beneficial to agriculture. Waste grain and weed seeds are sometimes eaten.

PREFERRED HABITAT: Upland sandpipers are birds of open country and characteristic of short-grass prairie. They may be found in large fallow fields, pastures and grassy areas (greater than 250 acres). Upland sandpipers need a mosaic of grasses in a large area, using the shorter grass areas for foraging and courtship and the taller grasses for nesting and brood cover. The regularly occupied areas now are on reclaimed surface mines. Increasingly, this species can be found nesting at airports across its range. They also have nested in blueberry farms and barrens as well as peat bogs in the northeastern part if its range. Rarely are more than one or two pairs found in a field until migration, when family groups gather in flocks or are joined by migrants.

REASONS FOR BEING THREATENED: Upland sandpipers were once more common than they are today, statewide and nationally. Around the turn of the 20th century, they attracted the attention of market hunters looking for a bird to fill the void created by the decline – and ultimate extinction – of the passenger pigeon. As a result, it is estimated that tens of thousands of upland sandpipers were shot in Midwestern states and sold at markets on the east coast from circa 1870 until the passage of the Migratory Bird Treaty Act of 1918, which protected these and other migratory birds from overhunting. The upland sandpiper was particularly vulnerable to market hunting because it typically allows a close approach and gathers in large flocks in transit. Large numbers were shot at favorite migratory stopover spots in Lancaster County and other agricultural areas. Today, loss of farmland to development, changing agricultural practices and extensive pesticide use are thought to be keeping numbers low. In addition, it is believed hunting and insecticide use on this bird's wintering grounds may be decreasing the global population.

Bob Moul Photo

MANAGEMENT PROGRAMS: Before any management programs can be initiated, surveys need to be conducted to determine where and how many upland sandpipers are currently breeding in Pennsylvania. This includes some Important Bird Areas, such as the Freedom Township Grasslands in Adams County. The persistence and productivity of the few active nesting sites need to be monitored. When possible, grasslands found to be used by upland sandpipers should be managed to avoid disturbance during the nesting season. Mowing after July 15 ensures that young sandpipers — and other grassland birds — will not be harmed. The U.S. Department of Agriculture Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) has been successful in Midwestern states to promote upland sandpipers and other grassland bird species and, therefore, should be encouraged on highly erodible farmland. Rotational grazing, no-till, and organic agricultural practices will also benefit the species. Prescribed burns at regular

intervals (two to three years) can help promote preferred grassland habitat for upland sandpipers. Privately and publicly owned prairie patches should be managed to preserve their original vegetation and structure. Native, rather than exotic and invasive grasses and herbs, should be maintained in these prairies.

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