



## Natural Heritage & Endangered Species Program

Massachusetts Division of Fisheries & Wildlife  
1 Rabbit Hill Road, Westborough, MA 01581  
tel: (508) 389-6360, fax: (508) 389-7891  
www.nhesp.org

## Upland Sandpiper

*Bartramia longicauda*

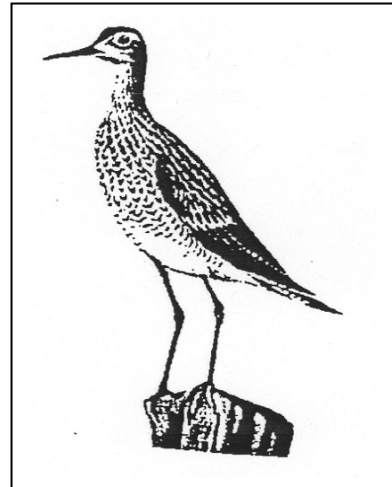
State Status: **Endangered**

Federal Status: **None**

**DESCRIPTION:** The Upland Sandpiper is a slender, moderate-size shore-bird with a small head, large, shoe-button eye, short and thick dark-brown bill, long, thin neck and relatively long tail. Legs are yellowish. It stands about 12 in (30 cm) tall and has a wingspan of 25 to 27 in (64 to 68 cm). The crown is dark brown with a pale buff crown stripe. The rump, upper tail and wings are much darker than the rest of the bird. Calls include a rapid “quip-ip-ip-ip” alarm call, and a long, drawn-out courtship call which has been described as a windy whistly, “whiip-whee-ee-oo”. The sexes are similar. This species often poses with its wings up raised when alighting on utility poles or fence posts.

### **ECOLOGY/BEHAVIOR:**

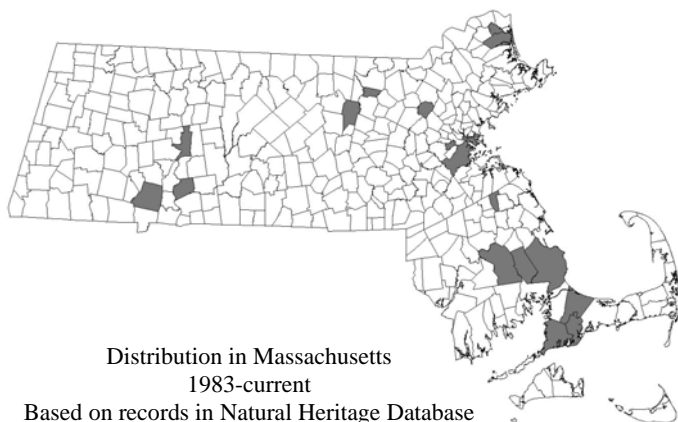
**Habitat in Massachusetts** – The Upland Sandpiper inhabits large expanses of open grassy uplands, wet meadows, old fields, and pastures. In Massachusetts it is restricted to open expanses of grassy fields, hay fields, and mown grassy strips adjacent to runways and taxiways of airports and military bases. They need feeding and loafing areas as well as nesting areas. It winters in similar landscapes in South America.



Robbins, C. S., B. Braun, and H. S. Zim. *Birds of North America*. Golden Press, New York. 1966.

**Movement/territory/breeding behavior** – The Upland Sandpiper returns to its breeding habitat in Massachusetts mid-April to early May. The birds arrive already paired and usually return to the same area year after year. Their courtship displays include circling flights by individual birds that last 5 to 15 minutes and reach as high as 1000 ft (305 m) during which they give their “windy whistle” call. On the ground, the male will raise his tail and run at his mate stopping suddenly. The nest is a grass-lined depression on the ground. It is well concealed by arched grasses making it invisible from above. Four, or occasionally three, eggs are laid at 26 hour intervals. The eggs are pinkish-buff with fine brown spots. Both sexes incubate the eggs beginning after the clutch is complete. Renesting may occur if the initial clutch is destroyed.

Incubating adults are well-concealed and will tolerate close approach before flushing. The adults are secretive around the nest, approaching it from a distance by walking cautiously through the grass,



Distribution in Massachusetts  
1983-current

Based on records in Natural Heritage Database

head held low and squatting lower and lower. Unless flushed, the bird leaves the nest in the same manner. Each bird has a characteristic flushing distance. It becomes less willing to flush as the eggs begin to pip. The adults are very unlikely to abandon the nest even if repeatedly disturbed, but will immediately desert if the eggs are damaged. The chicks are downy and precocial at hatching and leave the nest very soon thereafter. One or both adults care for the chicks, watching for danger as the chicks catch insects and as they sleep. The young reach full size and adult plumage by the time they fledge at 32 to 34 days. The adults do not defend the nest or a nesting territory. They do, however, drive other individuals and animals such as ground squirrels, away if they approach the young. This behavior diminishes as the young mature and disappears when the young fledge. After fledging, families and individuals begin to mix and form flocks. The Upland Sandpipers gather in increasingly large flocks in July and begin fall migration from Massachusetts in late July and August.

Feeding behavior – The Upland Sandpipers primarily pursue grasshoppers, crickets, weevils, beetles, ants, spiders, snails and earthworms on the ground. They chase the insects rapidly and even leap into the air in pursuit.

**RANGE:** The Upland Sandpiper breeds from Maine to central Canada and Alaska, Maryland to Oklahoma and Colorado. It breeds locally in Massachusetts. It winters in similar habitats in South America, particularly on the pampas of northern Argentina and Uruguay.

**POPULATION STATUS:** The Upland Sandpiper is classified as “Endangered” in Massachusetts. In 1985 a total of 25 to 27 breeding pairs nested at only 7 sites in the state.

European settlement created extensive nesting habitat through the clearing of the forest for agriculture and grazing. The Upland Sandpiper was common in the 1850’s and at that time was seen in the thousands. Commercial shooting for food reduced its numbers dramatically. Currently, after having been protected from hunting for over sixty years, it is threatened by loss of habitat to development and succession of open lands to forest. The Upland Sandpiper is experiencing population decline over much of its range, particularly in the Midwest and eastern United States.

*Updated August 2008*