



**Natural Heritage
& Endangered Species
Program**

www.mass.gov/nhesp

Massachusetts Division of Fisheries & Wildlife

**Saltmarsh Sharp-tailed Sparrow
*Ammodramus caudacutus***

State Status: **None**
Federal Status: **None**

SPECIES DESCRIPTION: A marsh sparrow with a sharp tail, streaked breast, and buffy-yellow facial pattern surrounding a gray ear patch, the Saltmarsh Sharp-tailed Sparrow is 5 to 6 inches in length. Its primary vocalization is a buzzing hiss, preceded or followed by several sharp notes: *tuptup-sheeeee*.

DISTRIBUTION AND ABUNDANCE: Breeding Saltmarsh Sharp-tailed Sparrows in Massachusetts are restricted to coastal salt marshes, where they may be locally abundant. The Massachusetts Breeding Bird Atlas Project (1974-79) confirmed breeding in 26 of 989 (2.3%) survey blocks and reported probable breeding in 11 blocks (1.0%) and possible breeding in 11 blocks (1.0%). Fall migrants occur in coastal salt marshes and, occasionally, inland freshwater marshes from late summer through October. The Saltmarsh Sharp-tailed Sparrow winters in coastal salt marshes from southern Massachusetts to Florida. NHESP does not track occurrences of Saltmarsh Sharp-tailed Sparrows in Massachusetts.

HABITAT DESCRIPTION: The Saltmarsh Sharp-tailed Sparrow inhabits coastal salt marshes dominated by saltwater cordgrass (*Spartina alterniflora*) and saltmarsh hay (*S. patens*). Most nests occur on or near the ground, just above high tide levels, and in salt marsh hay in the upper (i.e., drier) areas of salt marsh.

THREATS: Any activities that would destroy, fragment, or otherwise degrade salt marsh habitat, including dredging, ditching, filling, diking, or oil spills, may be threats to Saltmarsh Sharp-tailed Sparrows. High tide flooding and predation are the two primary factors affecting reproductive success.

REFERENCES:

- Greenlaw, G.S., and J. D. Rising. 1994. Sharp-tailed Sparrow (*Ammodramus caudacutus*). In *The Birds of North America*, No. 112 (A. Poole and F. Gill, eds.). Philadelphia: The Academy of Natural Sciences; Washington, D.C.: The American Ornithologists' Union.
- Petersen, W.R., and W.R. Meservey. 2003. *Massachusetts Breeding Bird Atlas*. Massachusetts Audubon Society and University of Massachusetts Press, Amherst, Massachusetts.
- Veit, R., and W.R. Petersen. 1993. *Birds of Massachusetts*. Massachusetts Audubon Society, Lincoln, Massachusetts.

Updated 2015

A Species of Greatest Conservation Need in the Massachusetts State Wildlife Action Plan

Massachusetts Division of Fisheries & Wildlife

1 Rabbit Hill Rd., Westborough, MA; tel: 508-389-6300; fax: 508-389-7890; www.mass.gov/dfw

Please allow the Natural Heritage & Endangered Species Program to continue to conserve the biodiversity of Massachusetts with a contribution for 'endangered wildlife conservation' on your state income tax form, as these donations comprise a significant portion of our operating budget.

www.mass.gov/nhesp