



**Natural Heritage  
& Endangered Species  
Program**

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*Massachusetts Division of Fisheries & Wildlife*

**Eskimo Curlew  
*Numenius borealis***

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

**SPECIES DESCRIPTION:** Eskimo Curlews are small, 12 to 14 inches long (smaller than the similar Whimbrel), with a thin, slightly decurved bill. The plumage is buff-colored interspersed with black; the undersides of the wings are cinnamon-buff. The call has been described as *tee-dee-dee* or a repeated *tee-dee*.

**DISTRIBUTION AND ABUNDANCE:** The Eskimo Curlew is nearly extinct; its current range-wide status is uncertain. The continental population of Eskimo Curlew plummeted during the latter half of the 19th century, from apparently hundreds of thousands of birds to so few that now sightings are considered extremely rare. Formerly it nested on Arctic tundra and wintered in southern South America. Eskimo Curlews migrated north through the Great Plains in spring and occurred uncommonly along the Atlantic Coast in late summer and early fall, including on Nantucket. There have been no specimens collected and only one convincing sight record of this species in Massachusetts since 1913: a sight record from Martha's Vineyard in August, 1972.

**HABITAT DESCRIPTION:** The habitat during fall migration in Massachusetts includes coastal beaches, dunes, intertidal flats and salt marshes, as well as heathlands, fields, and pastures. The principal foods during southward migration are berries, especially of ericaceous plants, and insects.

**THREATS:** The precipitous decline of this species is not fully understood, but is likely due to some combination of over-shooting during the 19th and early 20th centuries, conversion of natural grasslands to agricultural areas along its spring migration route across the prairies of North America (and, later, the pampas of South America), and suppression of fire. This species' social nature (making it more susceptible to hunting mortality), relatively low reproductive potential, and reliance on specific habitat types may also have contributed to its decline. Occasional reports sustain hope that it may still survive.

**REFERENCES:**

- Gill, R. E., Jr., P. Canevari, and E. H. Iverson. 1998. Eskimo Curlew (*Numenius borealis*). In *The Birds of North America*, No. 347 (A. Poole and F. Gill, eds.). The Birds of North America, Inc., Philadelphia, PA.
- Veit, R., and W.R. Petersen. 1993. *Birds of Massachusetts*. Massachusetts Audubon Society, Lincoln, Massachusetts.

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

**Massachusetts Division of Fisheries & Wildlife**

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