

## The Pease Grasslands Important Bird Area

The New Hampshire Important Bird Area Program is part of a national and international effort to identify areas that provide critical habitat to birds during some stage of their annual cycle. In New Hampshire the program is a partnership of the Audubon Society of New Hampshire, the New Hampshire Fish and Game Department, and the University of New Hampshire Cooperative Extension. IBAs are identified based on strict scientific criteria, including 1) the presence of threatened or endangered species, 2) other species and habitats of conservation concern, and 3) areas where birds congregate during breeding, migration, or winter. It is hoped that recognition of IBAs can help guide future conservation and research efforts at areas that meet these criteria.

The Pease Grasslands meet categories 1-3 of the IBA criteria, as follows:

1) Endangered and threatened species

Upland Sandpiper – Pease is the only place in the state where Upland Sandpipers nest regularly and in numbers. Surveys since 2000 have documented between 8 and 12 pairs in the area, a total slightly lower than totals in the early 1990s (12-15 pairs). Whether this decline is the result of habitat change, population shifting, or natural variation is currently unknown. During fall migration (August-September), large numbers (50+) of Upland Sandpipers have been recorded here, although no surveys have been conducted since 1997.



2) Other species and habitats of conservation concern

The principle habitat of interest at Pease is extensive grassland. In addition to Upland Sandpipers, the area supports large numbers of Eastern Meadowlarks (one of the highest densities in the state), Vesper Sparrows, and Savannah Sparrows. Bobolinks, Horned Larks, and American Kestrels are less common but still regular. Grasshopper Sparrows are irregular, and when they occur it is usually a single individual. This rarity is inexplicable in light of the extensive suitable habitat for this species.

3) Congregatory species

In addition to fall congregations of Upland Sandpipers, a few other shorebirds have regularly occurred in the area, primarily in fall. These include Killdeer (40-60 birds), American Golden-Plover (maximum 25 birds, usually 1-5), and Buff-breasted Sandpiper (1-2 birds). Pease is the most reliable location in the state for the latter two species, although Buff-breasted Sandpiper has become less regular since the late 1990s.

For the purposes of the NH IBA Program, the Pease Grasslands IBA is defined as areas of grassland within the fence of the Pease International Tradeport. Although Upland Sandpipers and other grassland birds have been documented using peripheral areas of Portsmouth (Pease Golf Course) and Newington (Fox Point, Great Bay NWR), such use is irregular at best and populations outside the fence are best viewed as secondary. Should this situation change as a result of management or population growth, the IBA could be expanded. The critical issue facing birds at this IBA is mowing. Currently the Pease International Tradeport operates under a memorandum of understanding (with NH Audubon and NHF&G?) regarding timing and extent of mowing to reduce impacts on Upland Sandpipers. At present, mowing practices at the tradeport appear compatible with both bird and aircraft use.

For more information on the New Hampshire Important Bird Area Program, contact:

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More details on the IBA Program are also available on the N.H. Audubon web site.