

SPECIES PROFILE

American Pipit

Anthus rubescens

Federal Listing: Not listed
State Listing: Species of Special Concern
Global Rank: G5
State Rank: S1B
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ELEMENT 1: DISTRIBUTION AND HABITAT

1.1 Habitat Description

American pipit is a ground-dwelling passerine that uses a broad suite of open terrestrial and estuarine habitats (NatureServe 2004). Of these, American pipit breeds in alpine sedge meadow communities dominated by *Carex*, dwarf *Salix*, and *Deschampsia*, and fell fields associated with cushion plants such as *Silene*, *Trifolium*, *Phlox*, and *Arenaria* (Verbeek and Hendricks 1994). Eroded turf, tussocks, or tilted rocks are necessary features of nesting habitat, as they provide snow-free nest sites early in the season (DeGraaf and Yamasaki 2001). During the breeding season, American pipit forages in open areas including sedge meadows, felsenmeer, streamsides, and pond margins on south-facing slopes, feeding almost entirely on arthropods, primarily insects (Verbeek and Hendricks 1994).

As weather conditions deteriorate in autumn, American pipit migrates southward throughout the United States and Mexico (Verbeek and Hendricks 1994). Habitats utilized during non-breeding periods include coastal beaches, marshes, mudflats, wet meadows, sandy areas, and cultivated fields, with a preference for mud flats and river courses (Verbeek and Hendricks 1994, DeGraaf and Yamasaki 2001). During migration and the winter, they eat terrestrial and freshwater invertebrates as well as seeds in the fall (Verbeek and Hendricks 1994).

1.2 Justification

American pipit is one of a few species of ground-inhabiting songbirds that breed in alpine habitat (Verbeek and Hendricks 1994). Alpine communities are rare throughout the Northeast, occurring primarily as isolated islands on high peaks. Fragmentation and degradation of these breeding habitats due to recreation, as well as loss of migratory habitat to wetland drainage and farmland reversion, negatively impact American pipit populations (Camfield 2005). In alpine habitats, climate change will induce interdependent changes in the composition, distribution, and phenology of natural communities. In turn, this will increase habitat fragmentation and disrupt migratory patterns, reproduction, and food availability (Halloy and Mark 2003, Lesica and McCune 2004). In response, American pipit populations may become locally extinct (Lesica and McCune 2004, Camfield 2005).

1.3 Protection and Regulatory Status

Protected under the Migratory Bird Act.

1.4 Population and Habitat Distribution

American pipit occurs throughout North America and south to El Salvador (Verbeek and Hendricks 1994). Regionally, its breeding range includes alpine and arctic tundra occurring above treeline between 33° to 78°N at an elevation range of sea level in the north to 4,300 m in the mountains of western United States. The range extends across North America from Alaska to Newfoundland and south in western mountains to California and New Mexico. During the non-breeding season, American pipit migrates to lower altitudes and latitudes, generally avoiding regions with persistent snow cover (Verbeek and Hendricks 1994).

In New Hampshire, this species is rare and irregular during the winter and breeding season, with a small breeding population occurring on Mt. Washington at elevations of 1,650 m to 1,680 m (DeGraaf and Yamasaki 2001). However, during fall and spring migration, American pipit is locally common to very common, especially in major river valleys and along the coast (DeGraaf and Yamasaki 2001). Although the distribution of American pipit sightings have recently expanded in New Hampshire, Christmas Bird Count data indicate a statistically significant decline in populations in all regions (Verbeek and Hendricks 1994, NatureServe 2004). This long-term trend could be related to global warming, urbanization, or habitat loss (Verbeek and Hendricks 1994).

1.5 Town Distribution Map

Not completed for this species.

1.6 Habitat Map

See Alpine Habitat profile.

1.7 Sources of Information

Published literature and New Hampshire Natural Heritage Bureau's (NHB) database.

1.8 Extent and Quality of Data

The New Hampshire distribution of American pipit is well documented.

1.9 Distribution Research

Winter ecology of American pipit is poorly understood (NatureServe 2004). More detailed information on winter habitat selection in southern United States and Mexico would be useful in determining areas of high concentration and detecting biologically significant population trends (Verbeek and Hendricks 1994).

ELEMENT 5: REFERENCES

5.1 Literature

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Distribution of American Pipit in New Hampshire

Distribution
■ Known



Known - verified field observations as reported in the
NH Natural Heritage Bureau's Element Occurrence Database.

