

SPECIES PROFILE

Eastern Meadowlark

Sturnella magna

Federal Listing: Not listed

State Listing: Not listed

Global Rank: G5

State Rank: S3B

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ELEMENT 1: DISTRIBUTION AND HABITAT

1.1 Habitat Description

The breeding habitat of the eastern meadowlark includes fields and open areas with perches, such as trees and fence posts, for singing males to establish and defend territories and to attract mates (Steele 1994, Lanyon 1995, DeGraaf and Yamasaki 2001). The eastern meadowlark forages for insects on the ground, occasionally probes the soil for grubs, and supplements its diet with seeds in the winter (Lanyon 1995). Eastern meadowlarks build their domed nests on the ground in dense vegetation or shallow depressions (Steele 1994, Lanyon 1995). Winter habitats are similar to breeding habitats, with the addition of feedlots and marshes (Lanyon 1995).

1.2 Justification

Populations of eastern meadowlarks have been slowly declining, particularly in the Northeast, where old fields and farmland are being developed or converted to woodland (Steele 1994, Lanyon 1995, Vickery et al. 1999). Surveys in 1994 yielded 14 breeding pairs, and in 2004, only 2 were observed (United States Geological Service Patuxent Wildlife Research Center 2005). Agriculture practices such as mowing during nesting season have reduced productivity of the eastern meadowlark (Lanyon 1995, Vickery et al. 1999). Eastern meadowlarks are also susceptible to brood parasitism by brown-headed cowbirds (*Molothrus*

ater) (Lanyon 1995).

1.3 Protection and Regulatory Status

The eastern meadowlark is protected under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act and through various grassland bird conservation programs (North American Bird Conservation Initiative, Partners in Flight Northeast Grassland Bird Working Group).

1.4 Population and Habitat Distribution

The range of the eastern meadowlark extends from central Canada eastward through the Atlantic states and provinces down to Florida and Mexico, southward to Texas, and westward to central Arizona (Lanyon 1995).

In New Hampshire, eastern meadowlarks can be found in extensive fields, grasslands, and farmlands, as well as in contemporary habitats such as airport safeaways, military installations, and golf courses. Meadowlarks are not found in the extreme north and southwest parts of the state (Steele 1994, Lanyon 1995, New Hampshire Audubon unpublished data). The New Hampshire Natural Heritage Bureau Database (2005) notes 29 locations where eastern meadowlarks have been observed (breeding and non-breeding), with a concentration of 9 locations in the seacoast region.

1.5 Town Distribution Map

Not completed for this species.

1.6 Habitat Map

See Grassland habitat profile.

1.7 Sources of Information

Birds of North America, New Hampshire Breeding Bird Atlas, New England Wildlife, breeding bird surveys and other unpublished survey reports.

1.8 Extent and Quality of Data

Eastern meadowlark habitat and population distribution is well studied, but little is known about nutrition, productivity, and wintering ecology (Vickery et al. 1999). Population data in New Hampshire are limited.

1.9 Distribution Research

- Identify and protect key grassland habitat areas
- Continue monitoring grassland habitats to better assess eastern meadowlark abundance trends
- Conduct productivity and survival studies to provide information needed for determining causes of population declines

ELEMENT 3: SPECIES THREAT ASSESSMENT

See *Grasslands habitat profile*.

ELEMENT 4: CONSERVATION ACTIONS

See *Grasslands habitat profile*.

ELEMENT 5: REFERENCES

5.1 Literature:

DeGraaf, R.M., and M. Yamasaki. 2001. New England wildlife: habitat, natural history, and distribution. University Press of New England, Hanover, New Hampshire, USA.

Lanyon, W.E. 1995. Eastern meadowlark (*Sturnella magna*). In *The Birds of North America*, No 160, A. Poole and F. Gill, editors. The Academy of Natural Sciences, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, and The American Ornithologists' Union, Washington, D.C., USA.

Steele, F.L. 1994. Eastern meadowlark. Pages 342-343 in *Breeding bird atlas of New Hampshire*, C.R. Foss, editor. Arcadia, Dover, New Hampshire, USA.

Vickery, P.D., P.L. Tubaro, J.M. Cardoso da Silva, B.G. Peterjohn, J.R. Herkert, and R.B. Cavalcanti. 1999. Conservation of grassland birds in the western hemisphere. *Studies in Avian Biology* 19:2-26.

5.2 Data Sources

New Hampshire Natural Heritage Bureau. 2005. Database of rare species and exemplary natural community occurrences in New Hampshire. Department of Resources and Economic Development, Division of Forests and Lands. Concord, New Hampshire, USA.

USGS Patuxent Wildlife Research Center. 2005. North American Breeding Bird Survey Internet data set. <<http://www.pwrc.usgs.gov/bbs/>>. Accessed 2 March 2005.

Distribution of Eastern Meadowlark in New Hampshire

Distribution

■ Potential



0 10 20 40 Miles

Potential – possible breeding and other observations as reported in the NH Natural Heritage Bureau's Element Occurrence Database and obtained from NH Bird Records and the NH Breeding Bird Atlas, Audubon Society of New Hampshire.

