

# Upland Sandpiper

(*Bartramia longicauda*)

**Appearance** The upland sandpiper is a pigeon-sized bird with a long neck and long legs. Its upper feathers are barred with grayish-brown markings, and it has a whitish belly. The upland sandpiper is a terrestrial species, not associated with water like other sandpipers. This species has the distinctive habit of raising its wings straight above its body upon landing.

**Range and Habitat** Upland sandpipers are often observed in open country, perched on fence posts or rocks, or standing along roadsides. They can be found in prairies and other grasslands throughout much of the northern and central United States and Canada. They are also found in agricultural areas, particularly on Conservation Reserve Program lands or wildlife management areas. They prefer areas with a mix of short and taller grasses and generally avoid dense, tall grass where predators like a fox may be lurking. In western Minnesota, upland sandpipers can be locally common in areas with extensive prairie and pasture. Though rare in eastern Minnesota, they sometimes turn up in large hayfields.

**Migration** In winter, upland sandpipers migrate to the grasslands of South America. In spring, upland sandpipers arrive in Minnesota in late April or early May. Upland sandpipers are one of the few sandpiper species that nest in Minnesota. In July and August they migrate back southward.

**Song** The upland sandpiper is perhaps best known for its distinctive vocalization, often referred to as the “wolf whistle”—a long, drawn-out whistle, ascending in pitch, followed by a second rising and falling note. Upland sandpipers give this mellow song upon landing and from high in the air.

**Status** One of the quintessential birds of the prairie, the upland sandpiper is an uncommon, rather sparsely distributed breeding bird over most of its range in Minnesota. *Minnesota's Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Strategy* identifies the upland sandpiper as a species of greatest conservation need due to concern for its population status in Minnesota and throughout its breeding and wintering grounds. Loss of native prairie habitat is the foremost problem for this species.

**Steve Stucker, ornithologist**  
*DNR Ecological Resources*



**RED RIVER  
PRAIRIE**

## a closer look at **CRITICAL HABITAT**

The upland sandpiper can be found in several ecological subsections in Minnesota including the Red River Prairie, highlighted in *Tomorrow's Habitat for the Wild and Rare: An Action Plan for Minnesota Wildlife*. This subsection today has less than 1 percent of its original prairie, and

nearly 90 percent of the land is planted to row crops. Still, it harbors some of Minnesota's most pristine and extensive prairie remnants, half of which are protected in state, federal, or Nature Conservancy preserves. To learn more, go to [www.mndnr.gov/cwcs/subsection\\_profiles.html](http://www.mndnr.gov/cwcs/subsection_profiles.html).