

MONTANA'S DECLINING GRASSLAND BIRDS

...need a variety of grassland conditions. Montana has some of the largest and most continuous grassland habitats remaining in the Northern Great Plains and is the last best place for a number of bird species that are in decline.

Chestnut-collared Longspur



John Carlson

Long-billed Curlew



John Carlson

McCown's Longspur



Ronan Donovan

Sprague's Pipit



John Carlson

Baird's Sparrow



John Carlson



Montana Fish,
Wildlife & Parks



Montana Nongame
Wildlife Checkoff

Discover Montana's Wildlife

— discover, preserve, protect —



MONTANA
Natural Heritage
Program



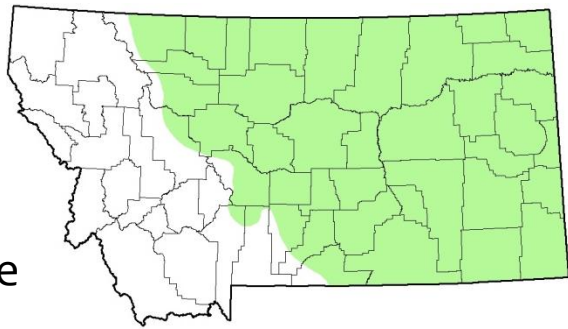
The University of
Montana

For more information on all of Montana's native species visit the Montana Field Guide <http://fieldguide.mt.gov>

Thanks to photo contributors, poster editors, and sponsors!

Baird’s Sparrow
(*Ammodramus bairdii*)

Status Ranking:
Species of Concern, BLM Sensitive



Habitat: Nests in ungrazed to moderately grazed mixed-grass prairie with moderately deep litter and moderately high forb cover. Tends to avoid areas with dense shrubs. Vegetation structure may be more important than species composition, although this species prefers native grasslands.

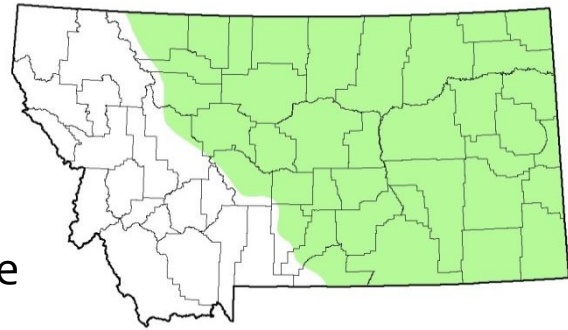
Feeding: Forages on the ground in between clumps of grass; avoids open areas. Picks insects from the ground or gleans them from vegetation. Feeds mainly on insects during the breeding season but shifts to seeds during other seasons.

Breeding: Male sings from the top of grass clumps , sometimes directly above the nest. Nests from late May through mid-July. Nests on the ground among grasses and typically in a depression created by the adult or in a natural depression such as a hoof print. Clutch size is typically 4-5 eggs. Eggs are grayish white and ringed with reddish-brown spots or blotches.

Management: Needs native grasslands with moderately deep litter. Prevent encroachment of woody vegetation. Encourage a mixture of grass heights, scattered forbs, and patchy areas of litter-covered open areas. Avoid heavy or continuous grazing.

Chestnut-collared Longspur
(*Calcarius ornatus*)

Status Ranking:
Species of Concern, BLM Sensitive



Habitat: Native mixed-grass prairie with minimal litter and low shrub cover. Prefers wetter areas within drier shortgrass prairie.

Feeding: During the breeding season, eats primarily insects but also eats seeds. Typically forages on the ground or gleans insects from vegetation; also fly-catches for insects close to the ground.

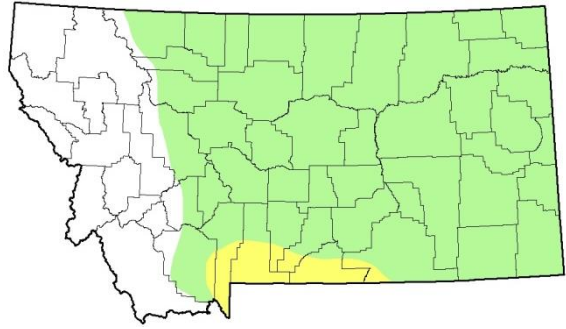
Breeding: Male sings both in flight and while perched. Nests from mid-May to late July. Nests on the ground in areas of sparse vegetation. Nests are located in a depression excavated by the female and are often placed next to cow dung or under a clump of grass. Clutch size is typically 3-5 eggs. Eggs are white, gray, or pale buff and marked with various patterns of brown, reddish brown or purple.

Management: Prefers grazed, native grasslands. In mixed-grass prairie, moderate to heavy grazing creates suitable habitat. Avoid overgrazing in areas of low soil moisture and shortgrass species.

For more information on these and other species:
<http://fieldguide.mt.gov>
Please report observations of these and other species:
<http://mtnhp.org/AddObs>

Sprague’s Pipit
(*Anthus spragueii*)

Status Ranking:
Species of Concern, BLM Sensitive



Habitat: Prefers open native grasslands of intermediate height with moderate litter cover and no shrubs.

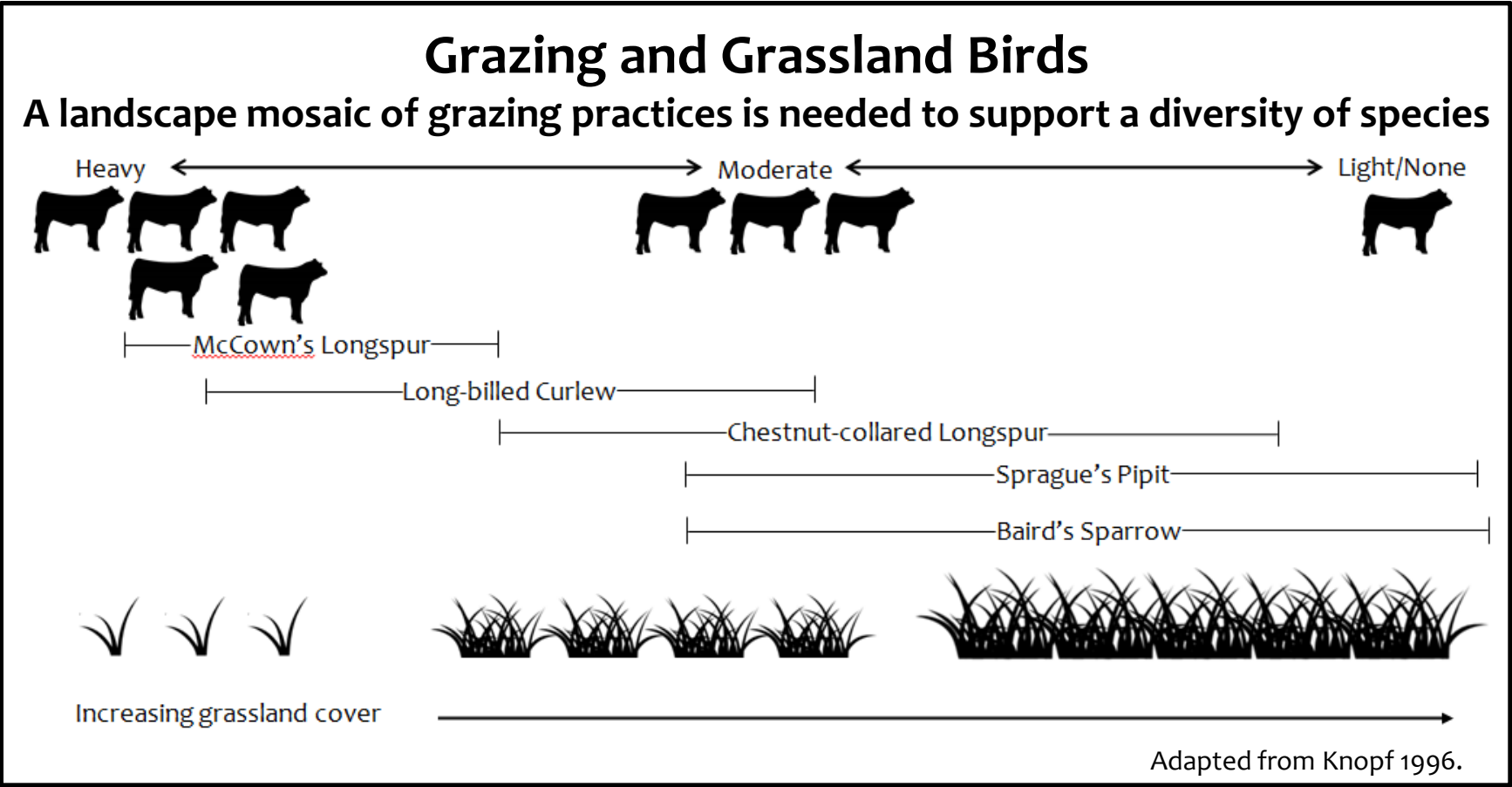
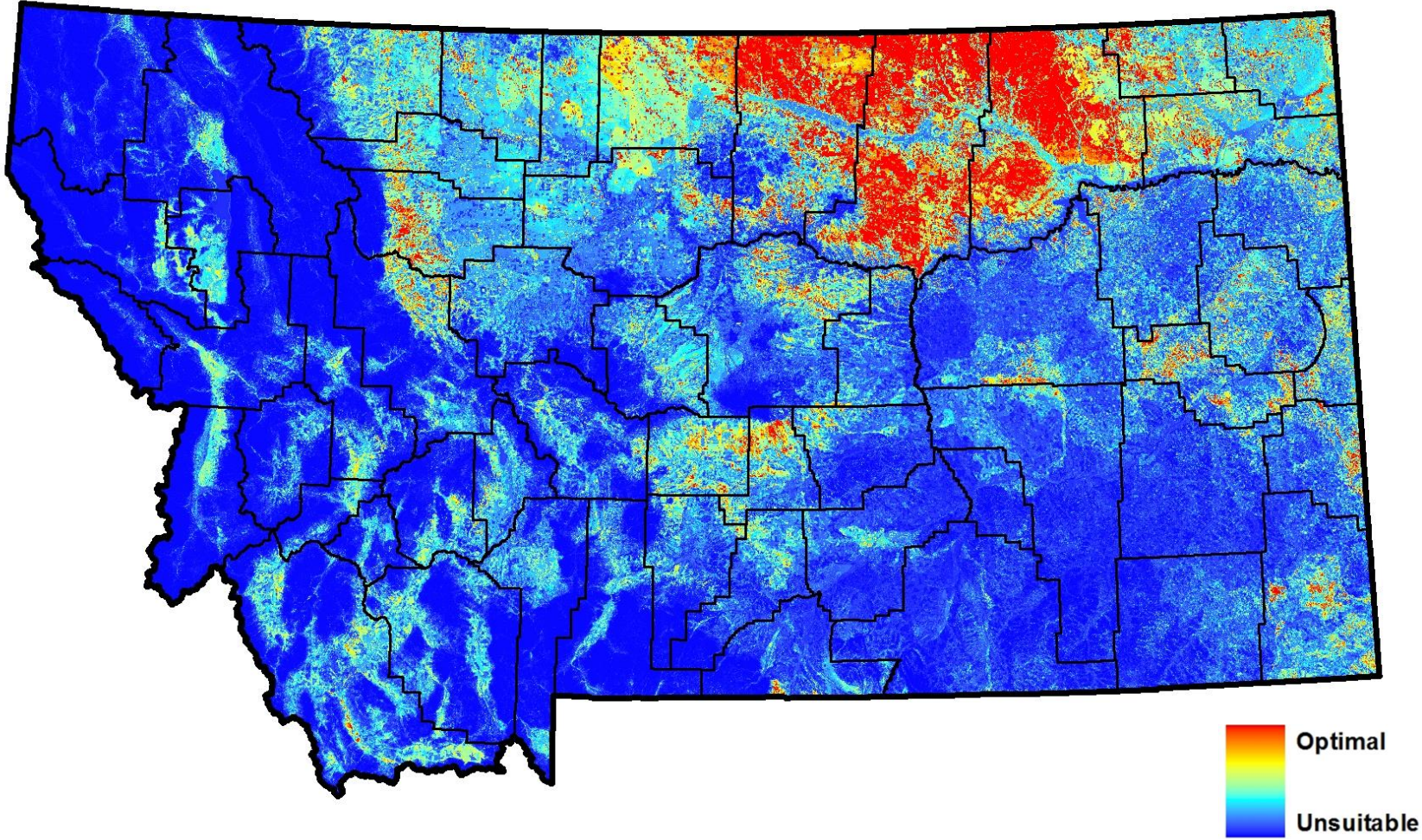
Feeding: Forages for insects and spiders on the ground amongst grasses.

Breeding: Male sings during aerial display from 100-300 feet in the air. Nests from late May to mid-July. Nests on the ground, usually at the base of a dense clump of grass. Clutch size is 3-6 eggs. Eggs are grayish white to pale buff with uniformly distributed olive to purplish brown blotches.

Management: Needs large intact native grasslands. Light to moderate grazing in mixed-grass prairie with higher moisture can create suitable habitat. Heavy grazing creates unsuitable habitat by reducing desired vegetation height.

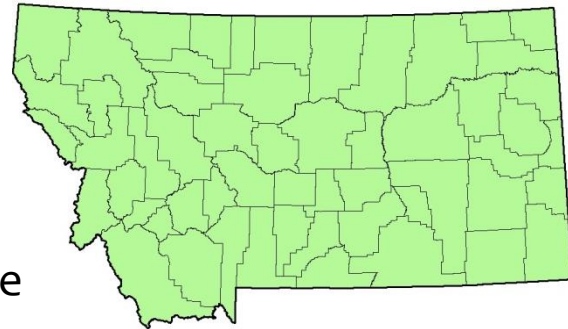
Montana’s Intact Grasslands are of Continental Importance

Intact native grasslands in Valley, Phillips, and Blaine counties of north-central Montana provide some of the best remaining habitat for these declining bird species, as shown by the composite habitat suitability model below.



Long-billed Curlew
(*Numenius americanus*)

Status Ranking:
Species of Concern, BLM Sensitive



Habitat: Uses open grasslands with short vegetation for nesting and areas with taller denser grass for brood rearing. Avoids areas with shrubs.

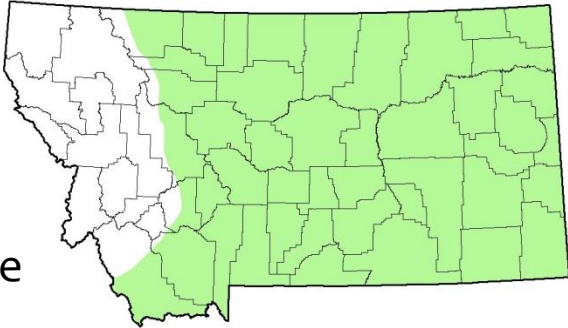
Feeding: Feeds on invertebrates and some small vertebrates. Uses its long, decurved bill to probe for prey.

Breeding: Male and female call in flight and from the ground. Nests from early May to early July. Nests are placed in a shallow depression on the ground typically near a conspicuous object such as cow dung, rocks, or dirt mounds. Clutch size is typically 4 eggs. Eggs are light beige to greenish olive and heavily marked with dark olive-brown or pale purple-gray markings.

Management: Prefers large intact native grasslands with short vegetation. Grazing early in the season can provide the short vegetation preferred by the species.

McCown’s Longspur
(*Rhynchophanes mccownii*)

Status Ranking:
Species of Concern, BLM Sensitive

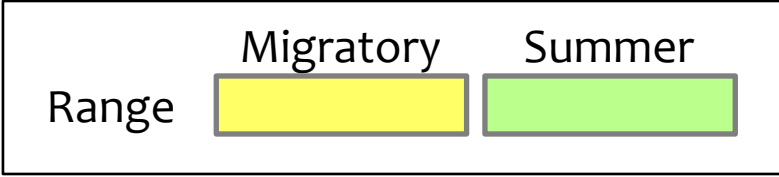


Habitat: Restricted to open grasslands with sparse vegetation and low litter cover provided by shortgrass prairie or heavily grazed mixed-grass prairie. Often breeds on high barren hillsides with southern exposures.

Feeding: Primarily eats seeds during the breeding season but also feeds on insects and other arthropods. Feeds primarily on the ground but also catches prey in flight.

Breeding: Male sings in flight during aerial display; male flies up, holds both wings outstretched, spreads tail, and floats down. Nests from mid-May to late July. Nests are constructed in shallow depressions on the ground and are often placed at the base of bunchgrasses, cacti, shrubs, or cow dung. Clutch size is typically 2-4 eggs. Eggs are white to pale olive with brown or rust colored markings.

Management: Prefers moderately to heavily grazed native grasslands dominated by shortgrass species. However, in areas of low soil moisture, overgrazing in shortgrass habitats can be detrimental.



Information on management/conservation of grassland birds:
<http://www.npwrc.usgs.gov/resource/literatr/grasbird/>
<http://www.stateofthebirds.org/habitats/grasslands>