

# EASTERN GRASSHOPPER SPARROW

*Ammodramus savannarum pratensis*



## Physical characteristics



Measuring between 10 and 13 cm, this small bird can be distinguished from other sparrows by its light brown, unstreaked breast. Males and females look very similar: both have a short tail, flat head, and conical bill with a pink lower mandible.

## Diet



During the breeding season, the eastern grasshopper sparrow feeds almost exclusively on the ground in low vegetation or patches of bare ground. It eats mainly grasshoppers, but its diet also includes seeds and prey such as butterfly and moth larvae, snails, beetles, ants, spiders, and earthworms.

## Habitat



This subspecies prefers fields with dry soil, sometimes recently abandoned, that are not regularly mowed or grazed and which feature sparse, heterogeneous vegetation. It can regularly be found in treeless, shrubless environments with alternating areas of tall and short grasses.



## Periods of vulnerability



- The eastern grasshopper sparrow arrives at its breeding grounds in mid-April and leaves toward the end of August.
- Little is known about the bird's migratory routes due to its secretive behaviour, but individuals coming from Canada likely migrate to the Caribbean, heading down the east coast of the United States and passing through Florida.

# EASTERN GRASSHOPPER SPARROW

*Ammodramus savannarum pratensis*



## Threats



- Increased mortality rate due to early hay cutting, as the eastern grasshopper sparrow nests on the ground.
- Habitat destruction due to agricultural intensification (conversion of land for annual crops such as corn and soybeans), urbanization, and reversion of fields to forest.
- Poisoning due to bioaccumulation of pesticides.

## Sustainable practices



- Postpone mowing until after July 15.
- Maintain grasslands that exceed six hectares.
- Limit reforestation and maintenance work on recently abandoned fields to the non-breeding season.
- Introduce rotational grazing and build permanent or temporary enclosures that keep livestock away from certain areas to protect nests from getting trampled and allow for grazing-free zones.
- When cutting hay, start at the centre of the field, not the edges, and work outward in a circular pattern.
- Reduce farm machinery speed to no more than 10 km/h.
- Raise cutting height to between 10 and 12 cm, particularly during the first two cuts of the season.
- Install a flushing bar equipped with small chains on the front of machinery used to do field work, especially during the nesting period (mid-May to mid-July).
- Leave land fallow when possible or recultivate fallow land by targeting areas and performing work outside breeding periods.



- As of 2023, species of **special concern** listed on Schedule 1 of the *Species at Risk Act*
- No recovery program, but: COSEWIC Assessment and Status Report on the Grasshopper Sparrow, *pratensis* Subspecies (*Ammodramus savannarum pratensis*) in Canada ([www.registrelep-sararegistry.gc.ca/virtual\\_sara/files/cosewic/sr\\_Grasshopper%20Sparrow\\_2013\\_e.pdf](http://www.registrelep-sararegistry.gc.ca/virtual_sara/files/cosewic/sr_Grasshopper%20Sparrow_2013_e.pdf))

## Sources

eBird. "Grasshopper sparrow." [ebird.org/species/graspa?siteLanguage=en\\_CA](http://ebird.org/species/graspa?siteLanguage=en_CA)

Earley, C. G. (2007). "Grasshopper sparrow" in *Atlas of the Breeding Birds of Ontario*, pp. 550–551.

Savignac, C., et al. (2011). *Status of the Grasshopper Sparrow (Ammodramus savannarum) in Quebec*.

[www.researchgate.net/publication/264699594\\_Status\\_of\\_the\\_Grasshopper\\_Sparrow\\_Ammodramus\\_savannarum\\_in\\_Quebec](http://www.researchgate.net/publication/264699594_Status_of_the_Grasshopper_Sparrow_Ammodramus_savannarum_in_Quebec)

Lamoureux, S., and C. Dion. (2014). *Stratégie de protection des oiseaux champêtres en région dominée par une agriculture intensive*. Regroupement QuébecOiseaux.

[www.agrireseau.net/documents/88389/partie-2-strategies-de-protection-des-oiseaux-champetres-en-region-dominee-par-une-agriculture-intensive](http://www.agrireseau.net/documents/88389/partie-2-strategies-de-protection-des-oiseaux-champetres-en-region-dominee-par-une-agriculture-intensive)

Gouvernement du Québec. (2023). "Bruant sauterelle." [www.quebec.ca/agriculture-environnement-et-ressources-naturelles/faune/animaux-sauvages-quebec/liste-des-especes-fauniques/bruant-sauterelle](http://www.quebec.ca/agriculture-environnement-et-ressources-naturelles/faune/animaux-sauvages-quebec/liste-des-especes-fauniques/bruant-sauterelle)

Expert review: Benoit Jobin, Patricia Désilets