

This resource is based on the following source:

Kale, H. W., II, B. Pranty, B. M. Stith, and C. W. Biggs. 1992. The atlas of the breeding birds of Florida. Final Report. Florida Game and Fresh Water Fish Commission, Tallahassee, Florida.

This resource can be cited as:

Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission. 2003, January 6. Florida's breeding bird atlas: A collaborative study of Florida's birdlife. <http://www.myfwc.com/bba/> (Date accessed mm/dd/yyyy).

Bachman's Sparrow *Aimophila aestivalis*

The Bachman's Sparrow, considered by many to be the most beautiful singer of all of Florida's birds, is a fairly common resident north of Lake Okeechobee. This small inconspicuous bird is one of the characteristic species of Florida's pine flatwoods, a habitat shared with the Brown-headed Nuthatch, Pine and Yellow-throated warblers, and in certain areas, the Red-cockaded Woodpecker. Two subspecies are resident in the state: *A. e. bachmani* in the Panhandle and *A. e. aestivalis*, the Pine-woods Sparrow, found in the peninsula (Howell 1932, Stevenson 1976).

Bachman's Sparrows breed from the central mid-Western states south to Oklahoma, Texas, and Florida.

Habitat. The preferred habitat of this species is open pinelands with an understory of grasses and saw palmetto. Howell (1932) reported Bachman's Sparrows to be common in treeless areas with dense palmetto. This "dry prairie" habitat includes Kissimmee Prairie Sanctuary in Okeechobee County, Avon Park Air Force Range in Highlands and Polk counties, and Three Lakes Wildlife Management Area in Osceola County (B. Pranty, pers. obs.). Atlas fieldworkers found Bachman's Sparrows in recently planted pine plantations and abandoned citrus groves replanted to pines (Noss and Muschlitiz in Paul 1988; B. Pranty, pers. obs.), a habitat not reported previously.



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Bachman's Sparrows feed on a variety of plant and animal food, especially grasshoppers and crickets. Spiders are also taken, along with insects, such as moths, beetles, caterpillars, and bees and wasps. Plants consumed include the seeds of pines, grasses, and blueberries (Howell 1932).

The female Bachman's Sparrow builds her well-hidden nest on the ground, in a clump of palmettos, or at the base of a small bush. The nest is built of coarse grasses, and is lined with fine grass and hair. It is cup-shaped and may have a domed canopy. Clutches in Florida typically contain 3 white eggs. The eggs hatch in 14 days. / 10 or 11 days of age, the young fledge and are cared for by both parents (Ehrlich et al. 1988).

Seasonal Occurrence. Eggs are laid from April to July (Stevenson and Anderson 1994). Two or 3 broods may be raised each breeding season (Ehrlich et al. 1988), which lasts from early April to late July (Howell 1932). Migrations and winter residents can be detected by the presence of birds away from their breeding grounds from September to April (Stevenson and Anderson 1994).

Status. Comparing the Atlas map with the map published by Howell (1932), a recent range extension into Marion and Palm Beach counties is evident. Otherwise, the 2 maps do not differ substantially, except for areas of recent human development, which has eliminated Bachman's Sparrow habitat from many areas.

The bird is eagerly sought by birders. Together with its relative abundance and distinctive song, which carries over a great distance, it was probably recorded in most of the quadrangles in which it occurs except for those with limited access or insufficient coverage.

Because of its secretive nature and plain coloration, the Bachman's Sparrow is difficult to detect, except when it

male selects an exposed perch to deliver his song. Long, beautiful, and varied, the song usually consists of a high-pitched introductory whistle followed by a series of trills. It can be described as "H-e-e-e-e-re kitty kitty kitty kitty." Howell (1932) wrote, "successive songs, delivered by a single bird, are frequently pitched in different keys, and the phrases are varied in form as well as in pitch."

Bill Pranty

Sponsored by Bradford T. Williams

Bachman's Sparrow

