

Florida grasshopper sparrow

Ammodramus savannarum
floridanus



(Photo by FWC)

Taxonomic Classification

Kingdom: Animalia

Phylum: Chordata

Class: Aves

Order: Passeriformes

Family: Emberizidae

Genus/Species: *Ammodramus savannarum*

Subspecies: *Ammodramus savannarum floridanus*

Common Name: Florida grasshopper sparrow

Listing Status

Federal Status: Endangered

FL Status: Federally-designated Endangered

FNAI Ranks: G5T1/S1 (Globally: Demonstrably Secure, Sub. Sp. Critically Imperiled/State: Critically Imperiled)

IUCN Status: Not ranked

Physical Description

The Florida grasshopper sparrow is a small bird that can reach a length of five inches (13 centimeters) with a wingspan of eight inches (20 centimeters) (Smithsonian National Zoological Park, n.d.). This species is drab colored with a pale median stripe on top of its flattened head, and a light brown breast.

Life History

The diet of the grasshopper sparrow primarily consists of grasshoppers and seeds (Vickery 1996)

From late March to July, males sing from perches on shrubs and grasses to maintain their breeding territories. The primary song consists of two or three weak introductory notes followed by an insect like “buzz”. A less frequent secondary song is a sustained rambling warble. Adults are sedentary, using the same territory during successive years. Nests are made of grass and are dome shaped and are usually located in a slight depression in the ground, well-concealed by clumps of dwarf live oak, wire grass, or saw palmetto. Grasshopper sparrows are bimodal breeders – they breed throughout the year (Vickery 1996). Three to five eggs are laid and then incubated for 11-12 days by both parents. Grasshopper sparrow eggs are creamy white with reddish-brown spots on the large end. Young grasshopper sparrows are nurtured upon hatching for about eight days. A second or third nesting attempt may be made within the breeding season.

Habitat & Distribution

Florida grasshopper sparrows inhabit dry open prairies that contain bunch grasses, low shrubs, and saw palmetto. They can be found in south-central Florida in the counties of Polk, Osceola, Highlands, and Okeechobee (Florida Natural Areas Inventory 2001).



Threats

The main threats to the Florida grasshopper sparrow are habitat destruction, degradation, and fragmentation. The conversion of open prairie habitat to agriculture fields has caused destruction of available habitats for the grasshopper sparrow (Seattle Audubon Society, n.d.). Conversion to agriculture fields can also cause fragmentation to their habitat. Prescribed burning plays a key role in supporting the grasshopper sparrow’s habitat, as it prevents their nesting areas from becoming overgrown and obstructs the invasion of woody plants (U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, n.d.). Overgrown vegetation and the habitat invasion from woody plants degrades their open prairie habitat. A

change in hydrological regimes also threatens the grasshopper sparrow, as excessive water can prevent normal reproduction during the nesting season (U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, n.d.).

Conservation & Management

The Florida grasshopper sparrow is protected by the U.S. Migratory Bird Treaty Act. It is also protected as an Endangered species by the Federal Endangered Species Act and as a Federally-designated Endangered species by [Florida's Endangered and Threatened Species Rule](#).

[-Federal Recovery Plan](#)

[-Federal Action Plan](#)

Other Informative Links

[Birds of North America](#)

[FWC Species Profile](#)

[FWC Breeding Bird Atlas](#)

[Seattle Audubon Society](#)

[The Cornell Lab of Ornithology](#)

[U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Species Profile](#)

[U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Multi-Species Recovery Plan for South Florida](#)

[U.S. Geological Survey](#)

References

Florida Natural Areas Inventory. 2001. Field guide to the rare animals of Florida.
http://www.fnai.org/FieldGuide/pdf/Ammodramus_savannarum_floridanus.PDF

Seattle Audubon Society. (n.d.). *grasshopper sparrow*. Retrieved May 23, 2011, from Bird Web: http://www.seattleaudubon.org/birdweb/bird_details.aspx?id=415

Smithsonian National Zoological Park. (n.d.). *Grasshopper Sparrow Life History*. Retrieved from Migratory Bird Center:
http://nationalzoo.si.edu/scbi/migratorybirds/life_history/default.cfm?id=190

U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service. (n.d.). *Florida Grasshopper Sparrow*. Retrieved May 23, 2011, from Multi Species Recovery Plan for South Florida:
<http://www.fws.gov/verobeach/MSRPPDFs/FloridaGrasshopperSparrow.pdf>

Vickery, Peter D. 1996. Grasshopper Sparrow (*Ammodramus savannarum*), *The Birds of North America Online* (A. Poole, Ed.). Ithaca: Cornell Lab of Ornithology; Retrieved from the Birds of North America Online: <http://bna.birds.cornell.edu/bna/species/239>