

Causes of Decline

- The 37 years from 1968-2005 were witness to a steady decline in pipit numbers in Canada, with an estimated 3.1% population decline per year.
- The main causes of decline include habitat loss and fragmentation, incompatible grazing, invasion of exotic species and woody vegetation, haying during breeding season, pesticide use, and climate change.



How can you help?

- Conserve native prairie! Areas 65 hectares (160 acres) or larger are most valuable to pipits.
- Avoid prolonged overgrazing, instead graze at a stocking rate recommended for your area.
- Reduce/remove woody and exotic species in native or tame grassland (e.g., by burning).
- Convert cultivated land to native or perennial cover.
- Delay harvesting hay until after the nesting season (July 21).
- Avoid using pesticides in or adjacent to native prairie.
- Avoid constructing built-up roads, and plant roadsides with non-invasive vegetation.
- Learn about Sprague's Pipits and share your knowledge with others.
- Participate in a stewardship program like Nature Saskatchewan's **Stewards of Saskatchewan!**

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Sprague's Pipit

Anthus spragueii



Status: Threatened

To report a sighting
call the Hoot Line:

1-800-667-HOOT (4668)

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Sprague's Pipit: Goldilocks of the grassland birds

Pipits require grass that is not too tall, not too short, not too dense, and not too sparse ... it needs to be *just right*.

Identification

- Sprague's Pipit is a small (15–17 cm, 23–25 g) ground-nesting songbird.
- It has brown and white streaked plumage.
- The head is characterized by a thin bill and relatively large brown eyes.
- The breast is composed of a necklace of short streaks, while the belly and flanks are unmarked.
- The outer white tail feathers contrast markedly with the inner brown feathers and are most noticeable when the tail is fanned during flight.
- Females are slightly smaller than males.



Habitat

- Native mixed-grass prairie is important habitat for Sprague's Pipits.
- Pipits are rarely found in cultivated lands, or in areas where native grasses have been replaced with planted forage species.
- Pipits are most likely to be found on blocks of prairie larger than 65 hectares (160 acres).
- Pipits require vegetation that is not too tall and dense, or short and sparse, with some litter; e.g., areas that are lightly to moderately grazed, or periodically burned.

Flight Display

- Pipits are secretive birds rarely seen out in the open and are most often detected by their song.
- The male pipit performs the longest known flight display of any song bird.
- Pipits deliver a sweet, thin jingling series, descending in pitch: “*shing-a-ring-a-ring-a-ring-a*”.
- Pipits can sing up to 100 meters in the sky for up to 3 hours at a time.



Distribution

- Pipits breed from the foothills of the Rocky Mountains in southern and central Alberta, to west-central and southern Manitoba, and south to southern Montana, northern South Dakota and northwestern Minnesota.
- During this century, it appears the breeding range has contracted, particularly in the northwestern (Alberta), northeastern (Manitoba), and southeastern (Minnesota) parts of the range.



Life Cycle

Nesting: Once a pipit finds a preferred nesting area, it begins building the nest. The nest is weaved into a cup from dry grasses, and covers it partially or completely in a dome of long grass.



Eggs, incubation, and chicks: Females lay 3-6 eggs between mid May and mid July. Females incubate the eggs for 10-12 days, and the young leave the nest 10-14 days after they hatch. Less than one in three nesting attempts is successful.



Predation is the leading factor reducing nest success. Drought and cold, wet weather can also reduce reproductive success (e.g., due to nest flooding).

Wintering: By late September, few pipits remain on their breeding grounds and by mid October, all pipits have left for their wintering grounds in Texas, Louisiana, Oklahoma, New Mexico, Arizona and northern Mexico.