

Ipswich Sparrow

Passerculus sandwichensis princeps



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Species Description

The Ipswich Sparrow is the *princeps* subspecies of the Savannah Sparrow. Males and females have pale grey plumage with greyish-brown upperparts, thin grey-brown breast streaks and whitish underparts. In the spring and summer, they have a yellow stripe near the front of their eye. Their tail is dusky and slightly notched.



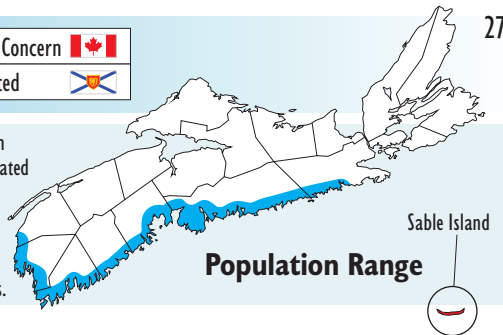
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In the fall and winter, the yellow stripe above the eye becomes very faint.

STATUS

Special Concern 
Not Listed 

Nests almost exclusively on Sable Island with an estimated population of 6000 individuals. Winters along the coast from mainland Nova Scotia to the southeastern United States.



Habitat

Breeds on Sable Island, 150 km from mainland Nova Scotia, in the heath and dense marram grass habitat of the island's dunes. Winters in outer dune beaches with grass cover and sheltered areas such as valleys. It is adapted to living in coastal dune habitat by being lighter-coloured and larger than the *savannah* subspecies.



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Ipswich Sparrows are typically observed on Sable Island in the summer. Migrants are observed on mainland beaches during April and October, and a few stay along the coast over the winter in the area indicated.

Interesting Points

- Males and females appear to winter separately with males wintering farther north than females.
- The two Savannah Sparrow subspecies are known to occasionally hybridize.
- The only songbird known to nest in large numbers in Sable Island National Park Reserve.



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Ipswich Sparrow with leg bands

Similar Species

The pale greyish plumage of the Ipswich Sparrow is one of the key ways to distinguish it from other sparrow species. It is found along the ocean shoreline and is not observed inland.

Savannah Sparrow:

Savanna subspecies: smaller, darker coloured with darker breast streaks.

Song Sparrow:

No yellow on face; triangular “moustache” stripes; pale central crown stripe.



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Threats to Survival

- Suitable breeding areas on Sable Island are limited and may be threatened by erosion.
- Mortality during migration.
- Habitat loss and disturbance on wintering grounds.



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Ipswich Sparrow nest

How You Can Help

Learn to recognize rare birds and report sighting of banded Ipswich Sparrows and other birds to Environment Canada (www.reportband.gov, 1-800-327-BAND) to help with migratory movement research. Encourage the conservation of dune beach habitat along the Atlantic coast.



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Tracking Ipswich Sparrows on Sable Island

Contacts, Information, Sighting Reports & Stewardship Opportunities

Contact: Environment Canada (506) 364-5044 or www.ec.gc.ca

Info: www.speciesatrisk.gc.ca, Maritimes Breeding Bird Atlas: www.mba-aom.ca

Sighting Reports: 1-866-727-3447 or www.speciesatrisk.ca/sightings, eBird.org

Stewardship: Bird Studies Canada 1-888-448-2473, www.bsc-eoc.org