

BACHMAN'S SPARROW

Peucaea aestivalis

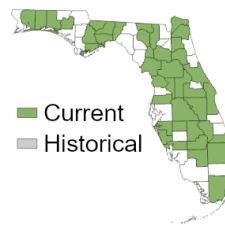
Order: Passeriformes

Family: Passerellidae

FNAI Ranks: G3/S3

U.S. Status: none

FL Status: none



Description: This large sparrow has beautiful russet-chestnut upperparts bordered with gray, buffy gray sides, and a whitish belly (Dunning et al. 2018). The large bicolored bill (dark upper bill) and relatively long, rounded dark tail are also distinguishing characters. Yellow at bend of wing is not very noticeable except when the feathers are erected during territorial disputes. Sexes are similar. Juveniles have a streaked front and a more distinct eye ring (National Geographic Society 2002). Listening for the beautiful song is a much easier method to note their presence. Birds stop singing but may elicit high peet notes and twitters in the post breeding months (Cox and Jones 2008).

Similar Species: There are few small, brown sparrows found in the pinelands inhabited by Bachman's sparrows during the breeding season. In Florida's open prairies, Florida grasshopper (*Ammodramus savannarum floridanus*) and Bachman's sparrows may co-occur, but the adult grasshopper sparrow is smaller and has a large flat head and short tail in contrast to the larger, round-headed, long-tailed Bachman's sparrows (Dunning et al. 2018, National Geographic Society 2002). The songs of the two species also differ. Florida supports dozens of wintering sparrows that might be confused with Bachman's sparrows. Few have the large, rounded head, long rounded tail, lack of wing bars and clear un-streaked breast of adult Bachman's sparrows.

Habitat: Inhabits open, mature pine forests or dry prairie that have a diversity of native grass, forb, and shrub species (Dunning et al. 2018). Generally occupies longleaf pine flatwoods in north and central Florida, mixed longleaf pine and slash pine in south-central Florida, and slash pine in south Florida outside the range of longleaf. Also found to use commercial timber lands and clearcuts (Haggerty 1988). Spends a great deal of time on the ground walking/running rather than flying, and are therefore inextricably linked to the open groundcover conditions created by frequent fire for foraging as well as nesting (Cox and Jones 2007). May use ruderal, successional communities in winter (Dunning et al. 2018).

Seasonal Occurrence: Permanent residents. Shifting territories may take place within an area in response to ever changing ground cover conditions

(Cox and Jones 2007). Birds may be augmented by migrants from the northern tier of states although winter abundance and occurrence is unclear (Dunning et al. 2018). Wintering sparrows may be overlooked in the winter because of their tendency to remain silent and secretive (Cox and Jones 2008). Broadcasting the primary song during surveys has proved to be an effective method for detecting wintering sparrows. Use of playbacks may help to clarify the wintering habits of Bachman's sparrows (Cox and Jones 2008).

Florida Distribution: Uncommon to fairly common and local from the western panhandle through the peninsula to northern Palm Beach County, Hendry and Lee counties, and irregular south in Collier, Broward, and Miami-Dade counties; absent in Monroe including the Florida Keys (Greenlaw et al. 2014, Stevenson and Anderson 1994, Tall Timbers Research Station 2018).

Range-wide Distribution: Bachman's sparrow breeds in scattered locations in the southeastern United States from very southeastern Virginia to southern Missouri (where it has almost disappeared), northeastern and southeastern Oklahoma, and east Texas to south Florida (Dunning et al. 2018, Breeding Bird Atlas Explorer 2018, Tall Timbers Research Station 2018, eBird 2014-2018). The sparrow is rare in southern Kentucky and northern Tennessee, and is only found in the Fort Campbell area that straddles the Kentucky-Tennessee border (Dunning et al. 2018, eBird 2014-2018). Very local in central and southern Tennessee and eastern Oklahoma (Dunning et al. 2018, eBird 2014-2018). Birds in the most northern part of the breeding range move south for the winter although winter abundance and occurrence is unclear (Dunning et al. 2018).

Conservation Status: The global population of this endemic passerine is estimated to be 190,000 mature individuals (Partners in Flight 2016) and approximately 63% of the population resides in Florida (Partners in Flight 2013). Bachman's sparrow is not listed in Florida by State or Federal agencies. It is listed as Near Threatened by BirdLife International IUCN Red List (2018) and is considered a Species of Continental Concern, Red Watch List by Partners in Flight (Rosenberg et al. 2016). Florida has an exemplary system of conservation lands, many of which have pinelands and dry prairie natural communities that are managed with fire. Declining trends seen in Breeding Bird Atlas (Breeding Bird Atlas Explorer 2018) and Breeding Bird Survey (Sauer et al. 2017) data are of concern although a relatively recent monitoring program established by Tall Timbers Research Station (2018) has yielded encouraging data from public lands and appears to be a better method for monitoring the sparrow. Recent data for 25 Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission Wildlife Management Areas and Wildlife and

Environmental Areas that have established monitoring programs for this species show an occupancy rate of >50% for 15 of the 25 sites and near 100% for eight sites (Tall Timbers Research Station 2018).

Protection and Management: Frequent fires are key to maintaining suitable habitat for Bachman's sparrows. Sparrow counts of singing males peak in the first year following a fire and show sharp declines >3 years after burning (Tucker et al. 2004, Cox and Jones 2008) and sparrows completely disappeared from an area within five years of fire exclusion (Engstrom et al. 1984). Florida has an exemplary public land base where many properties succeed in maintaining habitat conditions suitable for the sparrow. However, sites large and small, with tenuous Bachman's sparrow populations may require more frequent fire, ideally a <3 year fire rotation, to sustain the population (Cox and Jones 2007). Cautiously incorporating breeding season fire into broader burning regimes would help achieve the low intensity, frequent fire necessary to maintain healthy populations of Bachman's sparrows and other fire-dependent pineland species (Cox and Widener 2008). Expanding monitoring programs to additional properties in Florida and across the southeast may help target properties that need additional management (i.e. fire). Core areas of open, mature pine forest should be protected to provide for colonization from ephemeral habitats created by clearcutting and old field succession.

References: BirdLife International 2018, Breeding Bird Atlas Explorer 2018, Cox and Jones 2004, Cox and Jones 2007, Cox and Jones 2008, Cox and Widener 2008, Dunning et al. 2018, eBird 2014-2018, Engstrom et al. 1984, Greenlaw et al. 2014, Haggerty 1988, National Geographic Society 2002, Partners in Flight 2013 & 2016, Rosenberg et al. 2016, Stevenson and Anderson 1994, Tall Timbers Research Station 2018, Tucker et al. 2004, Sauer et al. 2017.



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