

**ARIZONA GAME AND FISH DEPARTMENT
HERITAGE DATA MANAGEMENT SYSTEM**

Animal Abstract

Element Code: ABPBX9901E

Data Sensitivity: No

CLASSIFICATION, NOMENCLATURE, DESCRIPTION, RANGE

NAME: *Passerculus sandwichensis rufofuscus*

COMMON NAME: Chihuahua Savannah Sparrow

SYNONYMS:

FAMILY: Emberizidae

AUTHOR, PLACE OF PUBLICATION: *Passerculus sandwichensis rufofuscus*, Camras, Publ. Field Mus. Nat. Hist., Zool. Ser., 24, no. 15, June 29, 1940, p. 159.

TYPE LOCALITY: Babicora, Chihuahua, Mexico.

TYPE SPECIMEN:

TAXONOMIC UNIQUENESS: One of two species in genus and only species in Arizona. One of seventeen subspecies in genus and one of three subspecies in Arizona.

DESCRIPTION: The species description is highly variable due to its geographic range. They have a heavily streaked breast that may or may not have a central spot. They also have a yellow or whitish eyebrow, a pale median crown stripe, a strong post ocular stripe and their tail is short and notched.

AIDS TO IDENTIFICATION: The numerous subspecies vary in size, coloration, bill size, and extent of streaking (NGS 1983 *in* NatureServe 2001). The species (*P. sandwichensis*) differs from song sparrow (*Melospiza melodia*) by usually having a yellowish eyebrow stripe, whitish crown stripe, short notched tail (vs. long and rounded), and pinker legs (Peterson 1990 *in* NatureServe 2001). Lacks the white outer tail feathers of the vesper sparrow (*Pooecetes gramineus*) (NatureServe 2001).

ILLUSTRATIONS: Color drawing of species (National Geographic 1999: 412)
Color drawing of species (Sibley 2000)

TOTAL RANGE: Breeds from central Arizona (Springerville) and central northern New Mexico (11 miles northeast of Chama, Taos) south to central Chihuahua, Mexico. Wintering range is unknown; recorded casually from Jalisco, Mexico and western Texas (east to Fort Clark).

RANGE WITHIN ARIZONA: Central Arizona (Springerville) south to border.

SPECIES BIOLOGY AND POPULATION TRENDS

BIOLOGY: The song of *P. sandwichensis* is an insectlike “tip tip tip seeee saaaaay.” Calls include a slight “tseep” or “tsip.”

REPRODUCTION: For the species the female apparently chooses the nest site, judging from the fact that the nest is commonly placed near the edge or outside male’s territory. Nest construction is performed by the female only and takes 1-3 days. The nest is placed on the ground and is well hidden. Preferred sites include shallow depression formed by birds in grass clumps or at the base of low woody shrubs. Most nests are concealed by a canopy of dead grasses or tucked under a tussock with a tunnel. The nest consists of two parts, an exterior form of coarse grasses with an internal cup of closely woven fine grasses built within. The exterior diameter is 7.5 cm (3 in); interior diameter 5.2 cm (2 in) and nest depth is 2.74 cm (1 in). The eggs are laid between March and July. There can be between 3 and 6 eggs but there are usually 4 to 5 and they are green-blue or dingy white and speckled to blotched with brown. The female incubates the eggs for 12 days and the young leave the nest when they are 14 days old.

FOOD HABITS: The species has a broad foraging niche. In the winter the main foods eaten are small seeds, fruits and insects when available. In the breeding season they eat adult insects, larval insects, insect eggs, small spiders, millipedes, isopods, amphipods, decapods, mites, small mollusks, seeds and fruits. They hunt for insects and other arthropods while walking on the ground, peering around the base of grasses and herbaceous plants.

HABITAT: This species is common in a variety of open habitats, marshes, and grasslands. *P. sandwichensis* breeds in grassland, meadow, tundra, marsh, bogs, and cultivated grassy areas (NMGF 2001). During breeding season, they prefer habitat with short to intermediate vegetation height, intermediate vegetation density, and a well-developed litter layer (NatureServe 2001). Non-breeding (winter) habitat use includes cultivated fields, pastures, golf courses, roadsides, dunes and salt marshes (Wheelwright and Rising 1993 in NatureServe 2001).

ELEVATION: General elevation for the species varies depending on habitat used, but may include elevations from 2,800 to 7,500 ft (853 – 2286 m) (NMGF 2001).

PLANT COMMUNITY: Plains and Great Basin grasslands. Per NMGF (2001), the species *P. sandwichensis* may occupy several different community types including Great Basin Shrubsteppe, Sonoran Desert Scrub, Chihuahuan Desert Scrub, Desert Riparian Deciduous Woodlands, Marshes; Annual Grasslands, Farms; River, Riparian Woodlands, Subalpine Marshes; and Mountain and Alpine Meadows. Examples of specifics include “Chihuahuan Desert Scrub – Open stand of creosote bush and large succulents (*Ferocactus pringlei*, *Echinocactus platyacanthus*) in southern New Mexico and southwest Texas; and Desert Riparian Deciduous Woodland, Marsh – Woodlands, especially of cottonwoods, that occur where desert streams provide sufficient moisture for a narrow band of deciduous trees and

shrubs along the margins” (NatureServe 2001).

POPULATION TRENDS: Unknown

SPECIES PROTECTION AND CONSERVATION

ENDANGERED SPECIES ACT STATUS: None
STATE STATUS: None
OTHER STATUS: Forest Service Sensitive (USDA, FS Region 3 1999).

MANAGEMENT FACTORS: Savannah sparrows (*Passerculus sandwichensis*) using grasslands of the North American Great Plains and Southwest for breeding or wintering usually respond negatively to grazing. They also respond negatively to grazing of breeding lands in riparian habitats of the western United States. (NMGF 2001). Avoid disturbing suitable habitat during the breeding season. Habitat destruction is also a main factor for this species.

PROTECTIVE MEASURES TAKEN: Unknown

SUGGESTED PROJECTS: Promote management or enhancement activities that increase the amount of contiguous grassland habitat

LAND MANAGEMENT/OWNERSHIP: Unknown

SOURCES OF FURTHER INFORMATION

REFERENCES:

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- New Mexico Game & Fish Department (NMGF). 2001. Biota Information System of New Mexico (BISON), Savannah Sparrow (*Passerculus sandwichensis*). New Mexico Game & Fish Dept., http://fwie.fw.vt.edu/states/nmex_main/species/041885.htm. Accessed 2002.

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MAJOR KNOWLEDGEABLE INDIVIDUALS:

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION:

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