



Natural Heritage & Endangered Species Program

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Massachusetts Division of Fisheries & Wildlife

Wilson's Snipe *Gallinago delicata*

State Status: **None**
Federal Status: **None**

SPECIES DESCRIPTION: The Wilson's Snipe is a cryptically colored, medium-sized sandpiper with a very long, straight bill. Wilson's Snipe inhabit wet meadow habitat during both migration and the breeding season, and are perhaps best known for their dramatic courtship/territorial display: a high, circular, often crepuscular flight accompanied by the tremulous winnowing sound of air passing through the flying birds outstretched tail feathers, modulated by rhythmic wing beats.

DISTRIBUTION AND ABUNDANCE: Wilson's Snipe are locally common migrants across Massachusetts, but as breeders are highly restricted in the state, relegated primarily to Berkshire County and a few sites east into central Massachusetts.

Atlas 1 surveys found that Wilson's Snipe were most often found in the high hills of the Berkshire and

Taconic region, where the high-elevation bogs most closely resembled their more typical boreal wetland breeding areas. Six out of 17 records occurred in the Berkshire Highlands region, with a few more in the Taconic Mountains and Marble Valleys. Farther east in the state, evidence of breeding Wilson's Snipes was thin. A probable record in the Connecticut River Valley and a pair of occupied blocks in the Lower Worcester Plateau were the only signs of the snipe's presence in central Massachusetts. No breeding was confirmed anywhere in eastern Massachusetts, but a handful of occupied blocks suggested that breeding may have been still occurring in small numbers in secluded marshes.

The Wilson's Snipe continued to be a rare and local summer resident and breeding bird in Atlas 2, and was only found at a few scattered locations. The greatest concentration of snipes was in the Berkshire Highlands region.

HABITAT DESCRIPTION: Wilson's Snipe breeds in wet sedge meadows and freshwater marshes with low emergent vegetation. During migration and winter, snipes can also be found in salt marshes, estuaries, and agricultural fields.

THREATS: Loss of suitable wetland habitat to is the primary threat to Wilson's Snipe in Massachusetts. Historically, this wetland loss was due to ditching, filling, and draining. Modern loss of suitable wetland habitat for Wilson's Snipe is now primarily due to successional advance in wetlands (for example, wet meadows becoming shrubby) and invasive species dominance.

MANAGEMENT: Maintaining suitable wetlands in an open state through prescribed fire, periodic mowing, and/or grazing is an essential conservation action, along with the removal of invasive species.

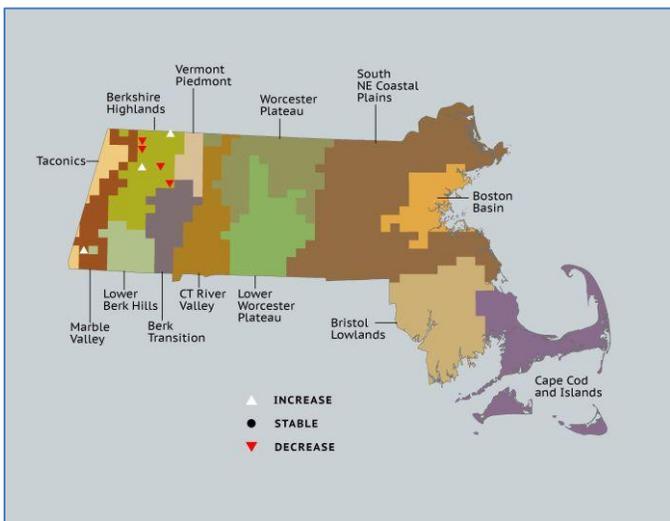


Figure 1: Changes between Breeding Bird Atlas 1 (1974-1979) and Breeding Bird Atlas 2 (2007-2011).

A Species of Greatest Conservation Need in the Massachusetts State Wildlife Action Plan

Massachusetts Division of Fisheries & Wildlife

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