

*The Field Sparrow is a common, but declining nesting species in old fields in the Hudson River Valley.*

### Conservation Status

Breeding Bird Survey data indicate a severe decline of this species in New York since 1966. In the Hudson River Valley, NYS Breeding Bird Atlas data portray a moderate reduction in distribution. Partners in Flight lists it as a Species of Regional Concern in Bird Conservation Regions 13, 28, and 30.

### Identification

This is a medium-sized bird with a generally brownish appearance, a gray face, reddish crown, a white ring around the eye, a rusty-brown streak behind the eye, and a pink bill and legs. The male is slightly larger than the female. The song is a series of clear musical whistles accelerating into a trill.



### Habitat

It breeds in old fields with scattered woody vegetation. Brushy as well as woodland openings and edge are also suitable. Wherever it breeds, it must have elevated singing perches. It generally does not nest near human habitation. Research has suggested that fields should be at least 5 acres to support Field Sparrows, although less common, they have been known to occupy smaller fields.

### Food

This bird feeds on the ground and in low vegetation. It eats weed and grass seeds, insects, and spiders. The summer diet is made up of mostly insects and some seeds. In winter, seeds are the main food. The young are fed insects and spiders.

### Nesting

Its nest is an open cup of large grass pieces interwoven with finer materials such as grasses and hair placed on or near the ground in grass clumps or at the base of shrubs. Estimates of territory size range from about 0.75 to 6 acres.

### Threats

- Maturation of early successional habitat to forest.
- Early mowing of hayfields.
- Changes in agricultural practices that convert pastures and hayfields to row crops.
- Loss of habitat to suburban development.
- Predation of eggs and young by snakes, eastern chipmunks, red fox, weasels, skunks, raccoons, and feral cats, as well as birds such as Blue Jay, American Crow, and House Wren.
- Parasitism by Brown-headed Cowbirds.

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**Management**

- Maintain shrub-dominated edge habitat adjacent to grassland or grassland with a shrub component (both of which include dense grass and moderately high litter cover) of at least 5 acres.
- Avoid management practices that completely remove the woody vegetation needed for perches.
- Can use prescribed burning to limit encroachment of woody vegetation, but allow some woody vegetation to remain.

**This management summary is adapted from Carey et al. 1994, Dechant et al. 1999, and NatureServe 2008.**

**For additional information, use the following references:**

Best, L. B. 1978. Field Sparrow reproductive success and nesting ecology. *Auk* 95:9–22.  
<http://elibrary.unm.edu/sora/Auk/v095n01/p0009-p0022.pdf>

Carey, M., D. E. Burhans and D. A. Nelson. 1994. Field Sparrow (*Spizella pusilla*), *The Birds of North America Online* (A. Poole, ed.). Ithaca: Cornell Lab of Ornithology; Retrieved from the Birds of North America Online: <http://bna/birds.cornell.edu/bna/species/103>.

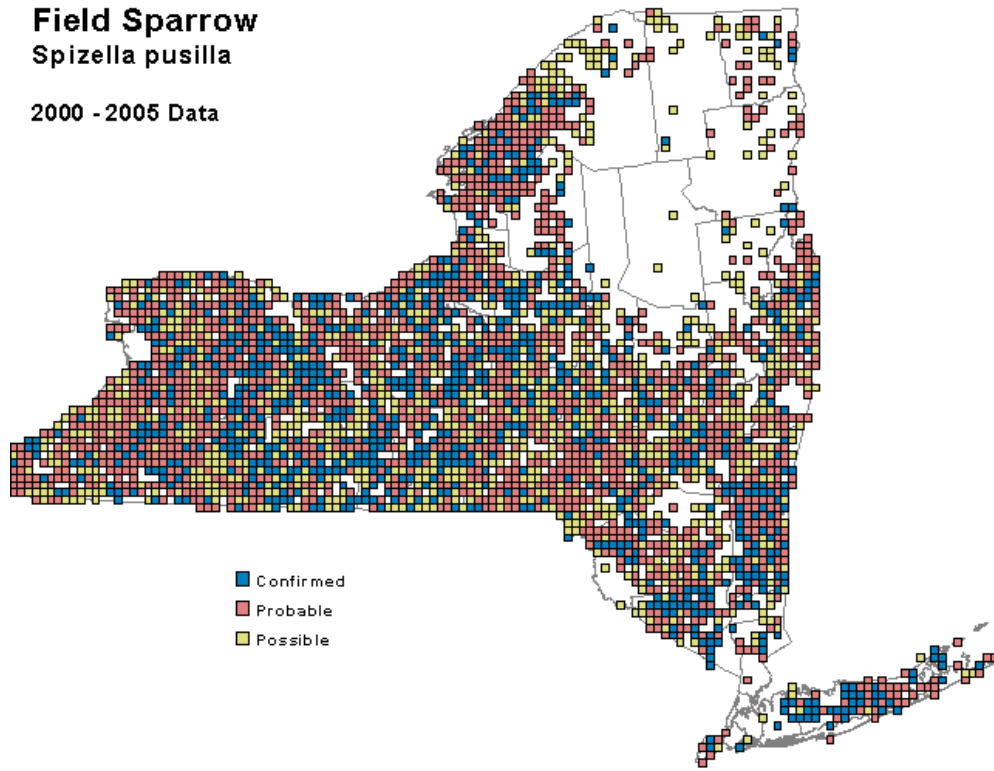
Dechant, J.A., M.L. Sondreal, D.H. Johnson, L.D. Igl, C.M. Goldade, B.D. Parkin, and B.R. Euliss, with revisions by M. Koenen, G. Hammerson, and D.W. Mehlman. 1999. Species Management Abstract for Field Sparrow. Nature Conservancy, Arlington, VA. <http://conserveonline.org/docs/2001/03/fisp.doc>.

NatureServe. 2008. NatureServe Explorer: an Online Encyclopedia of Life [web application]. Version 7.0. NatureServe, Arlington, VA. <http://www.natureserve.org/explorer>.

## NYS BREEDING BIRD ATLAS COMPARATIVE DATA

**Field Sparrow**  
*Spizella pusilla*

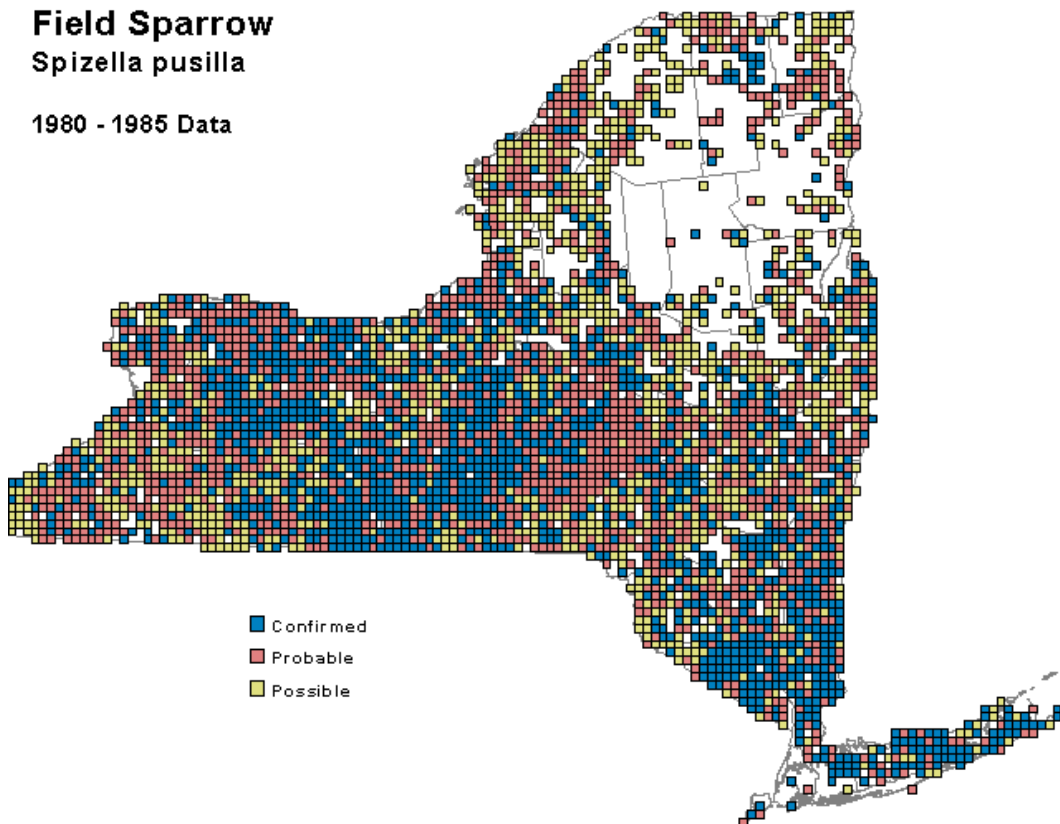
2000 - 2005 Data



■ Confirmed  
■ Probable  
■ Possible

**Field Sparrow**  
*Spizella pusilla*

1980 - 1985 Data



■ Confirmed  
■ Probable  
■ Possible