Species Status Assessment

Class: Birds  
Family: Scolopacidae  
Scientific Name: Tryngites subruficollis  
Common Name: Buff-breasted Sandpiper

Species synopsis:

Buff-breasted sandpiper was severely overhunted in the early part of the 1900s, reportedly declining to near extinction from a population that may have numbered in the millions. All available evidence suggests that buff-breasted sandpiper is declining across its range. It occurs in New York only as a fall migrant; spring migration occurs along the Central Flyway. Small numbers of birds occur in New York annually; rarely, groups reach 30 or 40. Sod farms provide the best habitat for buff-breasted sandpipers in New York.

I. Status

a. Current Legal Protected Status

i. Federal  
   Not Listed               Candidate:  
   No

ii. New York  
   SGCN

b. Natural Heritage Program Rank

i. Global  
   G4

ii. New York  
   SNRN Tracked by NYNHP?  
   No

Other Rank:

IUCN – Near Threatened
USFWS - Bird of Conservation Concern
Audubon Watch List – Red
U.S. Shorebird Conservation Plan – Highly Imperiled
Status Discussion:

Buff-breasted sandpiper is an uncommon, but regular fall migrant in New York. It is ranked as Near Threatened by the IUCN because the species underwent rapid historical declines and its moderately small remaining population continues to decline. Lolya (1998) reports "two flocks of more than 40" on plowed fields in Suffolk County in 1973 and 70 birds at another location in Suffolk County in 1977. He notes that although reports have increased in the previous 20 years, observations of more than one or two individuals are still very rare. This remains true today; birds are seen in small numbers annually with rare records of up to 40 birds in an area (Schiff and Wollin 2001).

II. Abundance and Distribution Trends

a. North America

i. Abundance

\( \times \) declining \( \_ \) increasing \( \_ \) stable \( \_ \) unknown

ii. Distribution:

\( \times \) declining \( \_ \) increasing \( \_ \) stable \( \_ \) unknown

Time frame considered: \( \_ \) Since turn of 20\(^{th}\) century

b. Regional

i. Abundance

\( \times \) declining \( \_ \) increasing \( \_ \) stable \( \_ \) unknown

ii. Distribution:

\( \times \) declining \( \_ \) increasing \( \_ \) stable \( \_ \) unknown

Regional Unit Considered: \( \_ \) Atlantic Flyway

Time frame considered: \( \_ \) Not specified
c. Adjacent States and Provinces

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>Abundance</th>
<th>Distribution</th>
<th>Time Frame Considered</th>
<th>Listing Status</th>
<th>SGCN?</th>
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ONTARIO

Not Present ______  No data __X__

i. Abundance
   ___ declining  ___increasing  ___stable  ___unknown

ii. Distribution:
    ___ declining  ___increasing  ___stable  ___unknown

Time frame considered: ________________________________  ________________________________
Listing Status: ________ Not Listed ___________________________

PENNSYLVANIA

Not Present ______  No data __X__

i. Abundance
   ___ declining  ___increasing  ___stable  ___unknown

ii. Distribution:
    ___ declining  ___increasing  ___stable  ___unknown

Time frame considered: ________________________________
Listing Status: ________ Not Listed ___________________________
SGCN? __ No __

QUEBEC

Not Present ______  No data __X__

i. Abundance
   ___ declining  ___increasing  ___stable  ___unknown

ii. Distribution:
    ___ declining  ___increasing  ___stable  ___unknown

Time frame considered: ________________________________
Listing Status: ________ Not Listed ___________________________
VERMONT  
Not Present ______ No data __X__

i. Abundance

___ declining ___ increasing ___ stable ___ unknown

ii. Distribution:

___ declining ___ increasing ___ stable ___ unknown

Time frame considered: ______________________________________________________________
Listing Status: ________ Not Listed ____________ SGCN? No____

d. NEW YORK  
No data ______

i. Abundance

___ declining ___ increasing ___ stable ___ unknown

ii. Distribution:

___ declining ___ increasing ___ stable ___ unknown

Time frame considered: ______ Past 20 years ________________________________

Monitoring in New York.

None.
Trends Discussion:

The population numbered in the hundreds of thousands to millions in the 1890s to 1900s (Gotthardt and Lanctot 2002, citing Forbush 1912 and Hudson 1920) and was brought to near extinction in the early 1920s by hunting; now is numbers only 35,000-78,000 (Lanctot et al. 2010). All available evidence suggests the species is declining, thus there is still a need to be concerned about the status of this species. In New York, Lolya (1998) states that reports of this species have increased in the past 20 years.

Figure 1. Distribution of buff-breasted sandpiper in the Americas (NatureServe).
III. New York Rarity, if known:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Historic</th>
<th># of Animals</th>
<th># of Locations</th>
<th>% of State</th>
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<td>prior to 1980</td>
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<td>prior to 1990</td>
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</table>

Details of historic occurrence:

Lolya (1989) reports two records of the largest concentrations reported in New York: two flocks of more than 40 birds on plowed fields in Suffolk County in August 1973; 70 birds in Suffolk County in September 1973.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Current</th>
<th># of Animals</th>
<th># of Locations</th>
<th>% of State</th>
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</table>

Details of current occurrence:

Lolya (1989) notes that “reports of this species have increased during the last 20 years but groups of more than one or two individuals are still very rare.”

New York’s Contribution to Species North American Range:

**Distribution** (percent of NY where species occurs)  
| __ | 0-5% | __ | 6-10% | __ | 11-25% | __ | 26-50% | __ | >50% |

**Abundance** (within NY distribution)  
| __ | abundant | __ | common | __ | fairly common | __ | uncommon | __ | rare |

**NY’s Contribution to North American range**

| __ | 0-5% | __ | 6-10% | __ | 11-25% | __ | 26-50% | __ | >50% |
Classification of New York Range

___ Core

X Peripheral

___ Disjunct

Distance to core population: 

IV. Primary Habitat or Community Type:

1. Cultivated Crops
2. Old Field Managed Grasslands
3. Urban & Recreational Grasses

Habitat or Community Type Trend in New York:

___ Declining     X Stable     ___ Increasing     ___ Unknown

Time frame of decline/increase: ______________________________________________________

Habitat Specialist?     ___ Yes     X No

Indicator Species?     ___ Yes     X No

Habitat Discussion:

Fall migrants are found in short grass plains and dry uplands (Johnsgard 1981). It has been observed in man-altered habitats such as sod fields, airport runways, golf courses, cemeteries, burnt-over grasslands, cotton fields, recently ploughed fields, newly planted rice fields, flat, hard, sunbaked stubble, and barren recently inundated land (Cramp and Simmons 1983, Lanctot, unpubl. data). Edges of ponds are used for wading, drinking, and bathing, but not feeding (Cramp and Simmons 1983).

In New York, sod farms across upstate and on Long Island have been the most productive place to observe this sandpiper.
V. New York Species Demographics and Life History

___ Breeder in New York

___ Summer Resident

___ Winter Resident

___ Anadromous

___ Non-breeder in New York

___ Summer Resident

___ Winter Resident

___ Catadromous

___ Migratory only

___ Unknown

Species Demographics and Life History Discussion:

Buff-breasted sandpipers presumably breed at 1 year, although lack of natal philopatry prevents accurate determination. No estimate of lifetime reproductive success because of low breeding site-fidelity. One brood per season. No natal philopatry and low adult breeding fidelity indicate most breeders immigrate from elsewhere.

VI. Threats:

On the breeding grounds, habitat is being lost or degraded due to energy production and climate change. Major threats on migration routes include the following four issues. (1) Loss of native grassland and prairie habitat has resulted from conversion to agriculture or from development. Grassland areas that have been preserved in the United States are frequently very small and few are managed to make them appropriate for buff-breasted sandpipers (i.e., short vegetation). (2) Exposure to pesticides and herbicides may pose a threat. Much of the habitat that is used during migration is subject to pesticide and herbicide use, i.e. airports and sod farms. (3) Increase in frequency and severity of hurricanes along Atlantic Coast could affect migrating juveniles. (4) Rather than causing direct mortality, wind fields could cause birds to avoid historic staging areas.
Buff-breasted sandpipers have both suffered and benefited from increased ranching. If properly managed, grazing animals can create this sandpiper's short grass habitat without drying out the ground. Oil drilling in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge may become another threat, as the accompanying roads and trash would support predators and disturb nesting.

**Are there regulatory mechanisms that protect the species or its habitat in New York?**

- [X] Yes

Buff-breasted sandpipers are protected under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act of 1918.

**Describe knowledge of management/conservation actions that are needed for recovery/conservation, or to eliminate, minimize, or compensate for the identified threats:**

Conservation actions following IUCN taxonomy are categorized in the table below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Conservation Actions</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Action Category</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Education &amp; Awareness</td>
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<tr>
<td>Land/Water Protection</td>
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<tr>
<td>Land/Water Protection</td>
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<tr>
<td>Land/Water Management</td>
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<tr>
<td>Law &amp; Policy Actions</td>
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<tr>
<td>External Capacity Building</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

The Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Strategy (NYSDEC 2005) includes recommendations for the following actions for transient shorebirds, which includes buff-breasted sandpiper.

**Fact Sheet:**

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Develop educational materials about conservation needs of shorebirds in New York, and promote habitat protection measures.

**Habitat Management:**

- As important foraging areas become known, identify potential threats and protect those habitats (e.g., beaches, tidal flats, shoals, etc.) from permanent alteration, degradation, or adverse human disturbances. Management may include acquisition, easements, establishing seasonal use restrictions, and posting or fencing, etc. as is currently done for beach-nesting birds.

**Habitat Research:**

- Conduct field studies to document ecology of transient shorebirds on Long Island, including important food items, habitat use (e.g., importance of tidal flats) and time/activity budgets.

- Compile data and input from birders to derive a map showing important shorebird foraging and resting areas in New York.

**Other Action:**

- Provide technical support, funding, or political support as needed, to further international shorebird conservation efforts.

**Population monitoring:**

- Identify specific locations, procedures, and observers (volunteer or other) for conducting annual shorebird surveys at 5-10 locations in New York, and initiate surveys as soon as possible.

**State Land Unit Management Plan:**

- On state-owned or other public lands, ensure that management plans consider shorebird needs and appropriately restrict site development and seasonal uses that may adversely affect critical shorebird foraging areas.

**Statewide Management Plan:**

- Develop a conservation plan for transient (non-breeding) shorebirds that regularly occur in New York, to include objectives and actions that we can assist with both inside and out of New York State.

**VII. References**


**Date last revised:** ______________ July 2014 ____________________