

Species Status Assessment

Class: Birds
Family: Scolopacidae
Scientific Name: *Numenius phaeopus*
Common Name: Whimbrel

Species synopsis:

North American whimbrels breed in two separate populations in the Arctic: a “western” population occurs across the Yukon Territory westward to Alaska while an “eastern” population is found south and west of the Hudson Bay. Both breeding populations winter along the coasts of North America. On the Atlantic Coast, wintering regularly occurs as far north as North Carolina. In New York, the whimbrel is a passage migrant, common on the coast during the fall and inland during the spring.

The U.S. Shorebird Conservation Plan places whimbrel in a “Highly Imperiled” conservation category. The Hudson Bay population has dropped from an estimated 42,500 in 1973 to only 17,000 in 2007.

I. Status

a. Current and Legal Protected Status

- i. **Federal** Not Listed **Candidate?** No
- ii. **New York** SGCN

b. Natural Heritage Program Rank

- i. **Global** G5
- ii. **New York** SNRN **Tracked by NYNHP?** No

Other Rank:

USFWS – Species of Conservation Concern
IUCN Red List Category: Least Concern
Audubon WatchList in 2002, but not in 2007

Status Discussion:

Whimbrel is a rare to uncommon coastal migrant during spring in New York. During the fall it is usually common to very common, but most flocks fly by without stopping. Inland, this species is locally fairly common to common in spring, much less numerous in fall (Feustel 1998).

II. Abundance and Distribution Trends

a. North America

i. Abundance

declining increasing stable unknown

ii. Distribution:

declining increasing stable unknown

Time frame considered: 1973 to 2007

b. Regional

i. Abundance

declining increasing stable unknown

ii. Distribution:

declining increasing stable unknown

Regional Unit Considered: Atlantic Coast

Time Frame Considered: 1973-2007

c. Adjacent States and Provinces

CONNECTICUT **Not Present** _____ **No data** _____

i. Abundance

_____ **declining** _____ **increasing** _____ **stable** _____ **X unknown**

ii. Distribution:

_____ **declining** _____ **increasing** _____ **stable** _____ **X unknown**

Time frame considered: _____

Listing Status: _____ **Not Listed** _____ SGCN? Yes _____

MASSACHUSETTS **Not Present** _____ **No data** _____

i. Abundance

_____ **declining** _____ **increasing** _____ **stable** _____ **X unknown**

ii. Distribution:

_____ **declining** _____ **increasing** _____ **stable** _____ **X unknown**

Time frame considered: _____

Listing Status: _____ **Not Listed** _____ SGCN? Yes _____

NEW JERSEY **Not Present** _____ **No data** _____

i. Abundance

_____ **declining** _____ **increasing** _____ **stable** _____ **X unknown**

ii. Distribution:

_____ **declining** _____ **increasing** _____ **stable** _____ **X unknown**

Time frame considered: _____

Listing Status: _____ **Special Concern** _____ SGCN? Yes _____

Monitoring in New York.

None.

Trends Discussion:

The U.S. Shorebird Conservation Plan places this species in the category of shorebirds that have shown to be in significant decline. The North American population has undergone a statistically significant decline of 84.7% since the 1970s. The Hudson Bay population has declined from an estimated 42,500 in 1973 to only 17,000 in 2007.

Population trend information for the subspecies is generally lacking, but limited information suggests possible declines of at least the eastern population in recent decades.



Figure 1. Distribution of whimbrel in North America (Birds of North America Online).

III. New York Rarity, if known:

Historic	<u># of Animals</u>	<u># of Locations</u>	<u>% of State</u>
prior to 1970	_____	_____	_____
prior to 1980	_____	_____	_____
prior to 1990	_____	_____	_____

Details of historic occurrence:

Smith (1986) reported on a record count of whimbrel in New York when a flock estimated at 212 individuals passed over Derby Hill (Oswego County) in August 1986. He noted that flocks of about 100 birds had been reported previously flying over western Lake Ontario in New York and Ontario. Coastal maximum counts reached a record of 250 birds in 1947 in East Hampton (Suffolk County; Feustel 1998).

Current	<u># of Animals</u>	<u># of Locations</u>	<u>% of State</u>
	_____	_____	_____

Details of current occurrence:

In 2009, a high count of migrating whimbrel in the spring was 74 individuals at Oneida Lake; the statewide total for May was 95 birds (Purcell 2009).

New York's Contribution to Species North American Range:

<p>% of NA Range in New York</p> <p><u> X </u> 0-5%</p> <p>___ 6-10%</p> <p>___ 11-25%</p> <p>___ 26-50%</p> <p>___ >50%</p>	<p>Classification of New York Range</p> <p>___ Core</p> <p>___ Peripheral</p> <p><u> X </u> Disjunct</p> <p>Distance to core population:</p> <p>_____</p>
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IV. Primary Habitat or Community Type:

1. Maritime Dunes
2. Lake and River Shore/Beach
3. Estuarine, Brackish Intertidal, Benthic Geomorphology, Tidal Flat
4. Estuarine, Brackish Intertidal, Benthic Geomorphology, Tidal Creek
5. Estuarine, Brackish Intertidal, Tidal Wetland
6. Pasture/Hay

Habitat or Community Type Trend in New York:

Declining Stable Increasing Unknown

Time frame of decline/increase: _____

Habitat Specialist? Yes No

Indicator Species? Yes No

Habitat Discussion:

During migration, whimbrels use beaches, tidal mudflats, marshes, estuaries, edges of tidal creeks, sandy or rocky shores, flooded fields and pastures (AOU 1983). Nighttime communal roosting occurs on saltpond flats and dikes, or in mangroves (Stiles and Skutch 1989).

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:

From Skeel and Mallory (1996): There is little information on age at first breeding. However, whimbrels normally breed every year after the first attempt, producing one brood per season. Few data are available on survival of chicks to fledging for North America. There is no information on lifetime reproductive success.

Adult survival is difficult to separate from philopatry; high return rate indicates low mortality. Oldest known individuals ≥ 11 yr (Skeel 1976) and 12 yr (Cramp and Simmons 1983).

VI. Threats:

The five most important threats identified for the whimbrel throughout its lifecycle include: 1) habitat loss and degradation, 2) contaminants, 3) disturbance, 4) harvest pressure, and 5) climate change.

Destruction or degradation of coastal wetlands, human disturbance during migration, and oil spills are all threats to this species. On wintering areas south of the United States, hunting and exposure

to environmental contaminants (cadmium, for example) are also threats. Hunting may currently be a significant threat to whimbrel in South America.

The species is susceptible to avian influenza so may be threatened by future outbreaks of the virus (see Birdlife International 2012). Sea level rise and increased frequency and severity of storms and flooding due to climate change may also affect available habitat and resources. Other threats affecting shorebirds include beach nourishment, sand mining, development of shoreline habitat, and shoreline armoring/use of bulkheads.

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

- No Unknown
 Yes

Whimbrel is protected under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act.

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.

Conservation Actions	
Action Category	Action
Education & Awareness	Awareness & Communications (educational materials)
Land/Water Protection	Site/Area Protection (acquisition, easements)
Land/Water Protection	Resource/Habitat Protection
Land/Water Management	Site/Area Management (posting or fencing)
Law & Policy Actions	Policy/Regulations (establish seasonal use restrictions, adjust state land unit mgmt plans)
External Capacity Building	Alliance & Partnership Development (support and participate in international shorebird conservation efforts)

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

Fact Sheet:

- ___ 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 (ex- 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 (ex- 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

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