

South Dakota Fact Sheet

SD-FS-93 October 2013

Long-Billed Curlew

What is the Long-billed Curlew?

The Long-billed Curlew is North America's largest shorebird. They are best identified by their long, bluish legs and a downward curving bill that can be as long as 9 inches. This duck-sized bird has buffy-cinnamon colored plumage with a 3 foot wingspan and can be 2 feet tall. They breed in the grasslands of North America and winter along the Pacific coast from California through interior Central America.

What is their "status"?

The Long-billed Curlew is **not** a candidate for listing under the Endangered Species Act. Like many other grassland species, numbers have declined over the past 25 years as suitable nesting and winter habitat has been converted to other uses. As a result, they are listed as a Species of Greatest Conservation Need in South Dakota and several other states. The continued decline of curlew populations has resulted in this species being a conservation focus in the United States, Canada, and Mexico.

Where in S.D. do they call home?

This species breeds and summers in the mixedgrass prairie west of the Missouri River. They begin to arrive in late March and early April and depart for wintering grounds from early June to mid-August.

Where am I most likely to see this bird?

The Long-billed Curlew is closely associated with expansive, open, level to gently sloping or rolling grasslands with short vegetation such on recently grazed mixed-grass prairie. They prefer large blocks of native grassland (120 acres or more) and avoid areas with trees when nesting.

They rarely nest in, but will forage on hayland, cropland, fallow, or stubble fields. They will also forage in wetlands and mudflats and along shorelines. Their diet consists of insects, worms, marine and freshwater invertebrates.



What are the threats?

- Loss of native prairie, e.g. habitat conversion to cultivated agriculture
- Grazing that decreases plant health and increases non-native species
- Woody plant invasion and invasive plant species
- Over use of insecticides

What are the opportunities?

Long-billed Curlew habitat can be improved by implementing appropriate grazing management, avoiding disturbance during sensitive periods such as breeding, restoring and maintaining wetlands, avoiding conversion of grasslands, establishing native grasses and forbs, and reducing the use of pesticides on grasslands to maintain invertebrates as a food source for birds.

Specific actions landowners can take are:

Maintain and Improve Healthy Grazing Lands: Grazing maintains grassland habitat. However, grazing needs to occur in a manner that sustains grassland plants. Ensure that a sustainable grazing system is developed and implemented that addresses both livestock and bird needs.

Several grazing ideas are outlined below:

- Maintain blocks of grass 120 acres or more
- Manage the intensity, frequency, timing, and duration of grazing to provide for 4-10" of grass cover prior to the nesting season
- Retain 5% of grasses/forbs cover 12-16" tall for broods
- Avoid grazing nesting areas during the nesting season to avoid nest trampling

The NRCS can help develop a grazing system that maintains and/or increases plant health and forage production while providing grassland nesting bird habitat.

Grassland Enhancement/Restoration:

Restoring prairie grassland habitats may help this species. Converting cropland to native prairie grasses and forbs (wildflowers) provides habitat when the restoration occurs in a location and size suitable to the bird's needs.

Ensure that native prairie restoration is developed and implemented that addresses both livestock and the bird's needs.

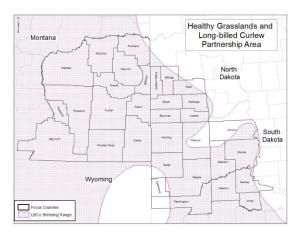
The NRCS can help develop a prairie restoration plan that provides livestock forage and bird habitat.

<u>Windbreak or Shelterbelt Placement:</u> Installing woody vegetation (not native to the ecological site) in open grassland areas fragments otherwise suitable habitat. However, landowners can design their woody planting to avoid and/or minimize the threat to this bird while achieving their specific objectives.

Avoid installing disconnected and isolated windbreaks and/or shelterbelts in native grassland. Locate woody plantings only in the vicinity of other plantings or existing infrastructure such as hay yards, farmsteads, bin sites, feed lots, and improved roadways.

The NRCS can help develop a windbreak and/or shelterbelt plan that provides livestock protection and conserves grassland nesting bird habitat.

The NRCS has partnered with the American Bird Conservancy to enhance grassland habitats using NRCS established programs and practices throughout a 32-county area in Montana, North Dakota and South Dakota. The American Bird Conservancy and its public and private partners in Mexico, the United States, and Canada aim to reverse the population declines of Long-billed Curlews through complementary, coordinated conservation actions taken simultaneously on their breeding, migratory, and wintering grounds.



To learn more contact your local NRCS office, go to www.sd.nrcs.usda.gov, or contact American Bird Conservancy personnel:

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