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Field Survey and Report of Dawson's Corner for the Presence/Absence of Henslow's Sparrow

Center for Conservation Biology Technical Report Series CCBTR-10-06

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The Center for Conservation Biology is an organization dedicated to discovering innovative solutions to environmental problems that are both scientifically sound and practical within today's social context. Our philosophy has been to use a general systems approach to locate critical information needs and to plot a deliberate course of action to reach what we believe are essential information endpoints.

Executive Summary

The property of Dawson's Corner was surveyed for the presence of Henslow's Sparrow on May 25 and May 26, 2010. There were no Henslow's sparrows found on the property and no other Virginia threatened or endangered bird species was found.

Background

Henslow's Sparrow (*Ammodramus henslowii*) is a rare breeder in Virginia that winters throughout the deeper Southeastern United States. Henslow's Sparrow is listed as a state threatened species by the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries based on its populations status. Breeding populations have declined substantially in Virginia and throughout its range. Currently, most breeding records of this species are from scattered individuals with the exception of once concentration of approximately 10 pairs that breed on the Radford Arsenal in Pulaski County. Historical records for this species do exist from Loudoun County and the adjacent areas.

Habitats used by Henslow's Sparrow include of early successional vegetation typically composed of a mixture of shrubs and low grassy areas. These conditions can occur in natural habitats as well as in agricultural and pasturelands. Henslow's Sparrows are often are found in wetter conditions such as grassy swales and require a well developed litter layer and standing dead vegetation (Herkert et al. 2002).

The property of Dawson's Corner in Loudoun County, Virginia was systematically surveyed for the presence of Henslow's Sparrow using acceptable survey protocol set forth by the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries.

Methods

A map of the study area was provided by Bowman Consulting that delineated an area of pastureland embedded with small trees, man-made ponds, and a narrow drainage. The bird survey consisted of a visual and auditory search of all open, early successional habitats available for Henslow's Sparrow within this study area.

Surveys were conducted on the mornings of May 25 and May 26, 2010 between the hours of 0730 and 1000. Both survey days were without precipitation and little or no wind. Surveys consisted of walking a zig-zag transect through the pasture habitat punctuated by 12 point count stations (Fig. 1). A broadcast of Henslow's Sparrows "tsee-slip" song was played at each point count station for a period of 5 min. The actual broadcast period consisted of alternating sequences of 20 sec of continuous calling (a single tsee-slip every 4 sec) and 20 sec of silence to increase detection of any responding birds to be heard. The combination of point-counts and transect walking resulted in a 2 hr total search of the study area during each visit. All bird species detected during the survey were registered on a data sheet. Point

count stations were positioned < 200 m from one another. Birds were often recounted between transect walks and point count stops so only a total species list is provided in the results.

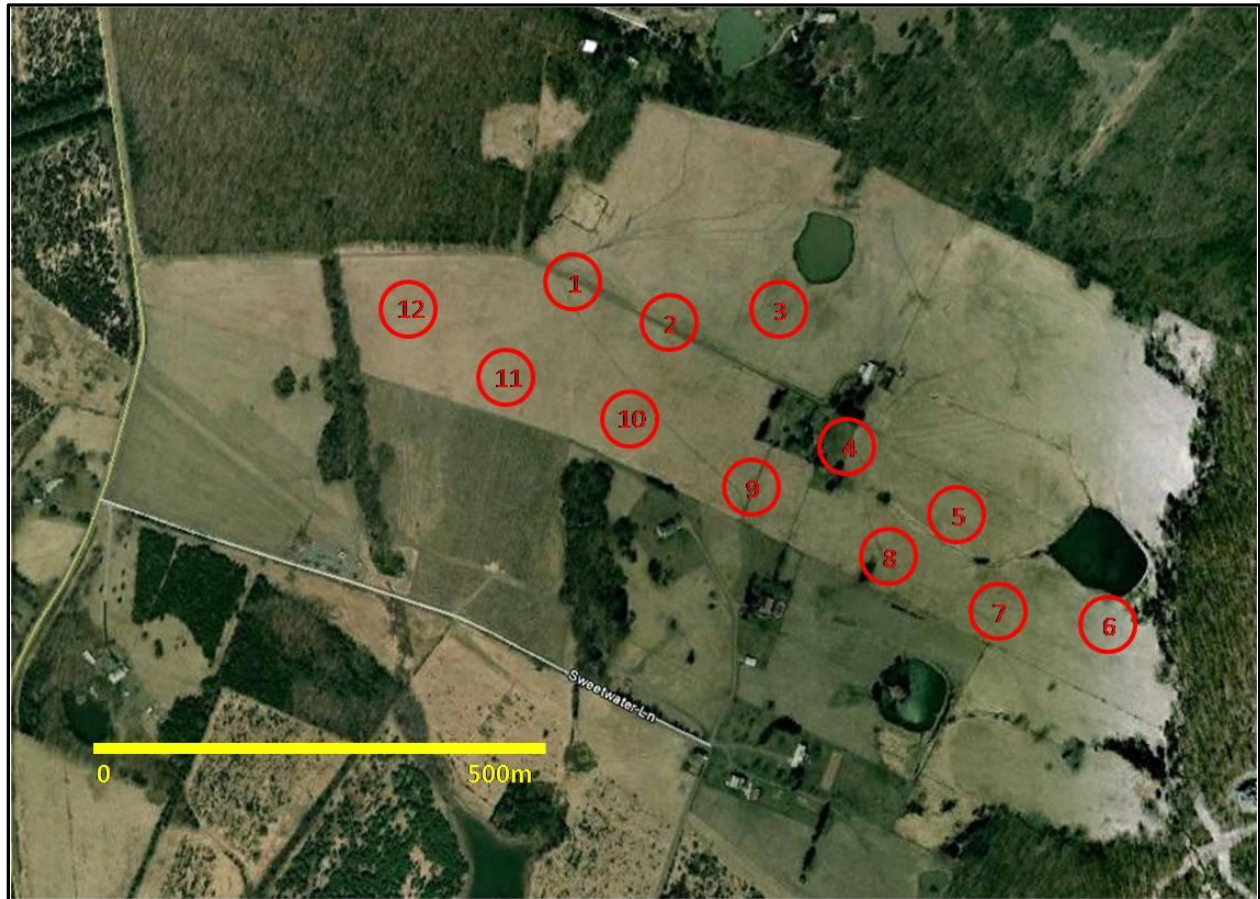


Fig. 1. Approximate locations of point count stations used as call-response surveys for Henslow's Sparrow at Dawson's Corner, Loudoun County, Virginia.

Results

Henslow's Sparrow was not detected during surveys. There was also no detection of any other threatened, endangered, or special concern bird species detected on the property (e.g., Loggerhead Shrike (*Lanius ludovicianus*), Upland Sandpiper (*Bartramia longicauda*)). A total of 19 bird species were detected using the study area (Table 1). All species detected were found on both survey visits and total numbers were consistent indicating that the methods were reliable for species detection.

Table 1. List of bird species detected using the Dawson's Corner study area.

Common name	Species name	Common name	Species name
Canada Goose	<i>Branta canadensis</i>	European Starling	<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>
Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>	Common Yellowthroat	<i>Geothlypis trichas</i>
Tree Swallow	<i>Tachycineta bicolor</i>	Grasshopper Sparrow	<i>Ammodramus savannarum</i>
Barn Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>	Field Sparrow	<i>Spizella pusilla</i>
Blue Jay	<i>Cyanocitta cristata</i>	Song Sparrow	<i>Melospiza melodia</i>
Northern Mockingbird	<i>Mimus polyglottos</i>	Northern Cardinal	<i>Cardinalis cardinalis</i>
Red-winged Blackbird	<i>Agelaius phoeniceus</i>	Blue Grosbeak	<i>Passerina caerulea</i>
Gray Catbird	<i>Dumtella carolinensis</i>	Orchard Oriole	<i>Icterus spurius</i>
Eastern Kingbird	<i>Tyrannus tyrannus</i>	Eastern Meadowlark	<i>Sturnella magna</i>
Eastern Bluebird	<i>Sialia sialis</i>		

Literature Cited

Herkert, J.R., P. D. Vickery and D. E. Kroodsma. 2002. Henslow's Sparrow (*Ammodramus henslowii*), The Birds of North America Online (A. Poole, Ed.). Ithaca: Cornell Lab of Ornithology; Birds of North America Online: <http://bna.birds.cornell.edu/bna/species/672doi:10.2173/bna.672>