Conspecific Attraction as a Management Tool for Conserving Upland Sandpipers

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Abstract- Historically the Northeast was a completely forested landscape and provided little habitat for primarily grassland-dependent birds, but European colonization and subsequent agricultural expansion during the 1800's deforested 80% of the state, and transformed New England's forests to hayfields, row crops, pastures, and orchards. This alteration of the landscape provided new habitat for grassland specialists, including the Upland Sandpiper (*Bartramia longicauda).* During the early 1900's, many agricultural fields and farms were abandoned, which lead to the reversion of the fields back into forests. The decline in Upland Sandpiper populations in the Northeast is primarily a result of habitat loss and more intensive management practices on remaining agricultural fields. The goal of this project was to determine if conspecific attraction, a behavioral characteristic of social bird species, is effective in attracting upland sandpipers to suitable breeding habitat. I hypothesized that successfully attracting birds to late-cut fields would increase the nesting success and site fidelity. Sandpiper decoys and playbacks with upland sandpiper vocalizations were placed in areas that were in the upland sandpiper's historic range to attempt to attract a breeding pair to late-mowed fields. The study fields and control sites at Mississqoui Wildlife Refuge and Shelburne Farms in Vermont were monitored from early April to early July, twice per week. In late August, decoys and playback equipement were returned to the fields to attract naïve juveniles or birds on fall migration. Study and control sites were searched for the presence of upland sandpipers. However at the end of the monitoring period (April-August) no upland sandpipers were seen or heard on or near the study sites. One possible explanation for the inability of conspecific attraction device's to attract birds to the study sites could be due to the rarity of upland sandpipers in the Northeast, and especially Vermont. Further studies using decoys and playback devices at more study sites might increase the chance of attracting upland sandpipers to higher quality habitat. Because the presence of a bird could only be noted if a researcher was present, it is possible that sandpipers visited a study field during a time that the field without being detected.