

Report Title

Reducing Bird-Strike Risk at Portsmouth International Airport (PSM) through Research



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Report Link

<http://www.nh.gov/dot/org/projectdevelopment/materials/research/projects/documents/14282U-FINALREPORT.pdf>

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Why was it studied?

The upland sandpiper (*Bartramia longicauda*) is a rare bird that requires large areas of open grassland habitat. This species is listed as State-Endangered in New Hampshire. State law requires protection of this species and its habitat but airport safety is also a critical concern. Upland sandpipers nest on the ground and as more of New England reverts back to forested land, the species has gravitated towards wide open expanses of grass found at large airports. Mowing operations can impact the upland sandpiper especially during the critical nesting period. In past years, the grassy fields on the airport grounds were not mowed to protect the rare bird. However, recent federal guidance for airport operations recommends maintaining grass heights below 12 inches. This is to prevent seed head formation which attracts birds such as Canada geese, starlings, and turkeys. These birds are much more likely to be struck by planes.

What was done?

Daily surveys used measures to flush nesting birds in order to map breeding activity. Mower operators logged sightings of upland sandpiper adults and chicks. Captured birds were banded and some of the birds were fitted with transmitters to track their movement. A survey of other ideal habitat within New Hampshire yielded few candidate sites and they typically had land uses (i.e., golf course) not suitable for upland sandpipers.



Source: U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

What did we learn?

Portsmouth International Airport at Pease is expected to remain a primary location for a suitable habitat. Nearby non-forested sites are currently not attracting the upland sandpipers. These sites would require substantial clearing of weeds, woody shrubs and hedgerows. Additionally, the sites are smaller than areas favored by the upland sandpiper.

How can we use it?

Mowing practices, including the use of flushing bars and cutting schedules that allow breeding and nesting, help enhance the opportunities for these protected birds to survive and thrive. Mower operators are trained to identify birds and nesting locations and then apply methods to avoid harm to the birds. Once located, nests can be avoided during mowing operations.