

DESCRIPTION OF RESIDENCE FOR SPRAGUE'S PIPIT (*Anthus spragueii*) IN CANADA

Section 33 of the *Species at Risk Act* (SARA) prohibits damaging or destroying the residence of a listed threatened, endangered, or extirpated species. SARA defines residence as: “a dwelling-place, such as a den, nest or other similar area or place, that is occupied or habitually occupied by one or more individuals during all or part of their life cycles, including breeding, rearing, staging, wintering, feeding or hibernating” [s.2(1)].

The prohibition comes into effect immediately upon listing for all threatened, endangered, and extirpated species on federal lands, and for species under pre-existing federal jurisdiction on all lands. Species under pre-existing federal jurisdiction are aquatic species (a wildlife species that is a fish, as defined in section 2 of the *Fisheries Act*, or a marine plant, as defined in section 47 of that Act) or migratory birds protected under the *Migratory Birds Convention Act*. SARA also contains a provision to prohibit the destruction of non-federal species' residences on provincial, territorial, and private lands by way of an Order by the Governor in Council (GIC), if the Minister of the Environment recommends it necessary to do so [s.34(2), 35(2)].

The following is a description of residence for the Sprague's Pipit (*Anthus spragueii*), created for the purposes of increasing public awareness and aiding enforcement of the above prohibition. As a migratory bird protected under the MBCA, the Sprague's pipit is under federal jurisdiction and thus the residence prohibition is in effect on all lands where the species occurs. They are known to have one type of residence – the nest.

Species Information:

Common Name – Sprague's Pipit

Scientific Name – *Anthus spragueii*

Current COSEWIC Status & Year of Designation – Threatened (2000)

Occurrence in Canada – The Canadian range of the Sprague's Pipit is largely confined to the grassland and aspen parkland regions of the prairie provinces¹. In Canada, the Sprague's Pipit breeds primarily in native prairie from the foothills of the Rocky Mountains in southern and central Alberta², to west-central and south-western Manitoba³. A single confirmed breeding record also occurred in south-central British Columbia⁴ (Fig. 1).

Rationale for Designation– Continued loss of breeding habitat and rapidly declining population throughout its range¹.

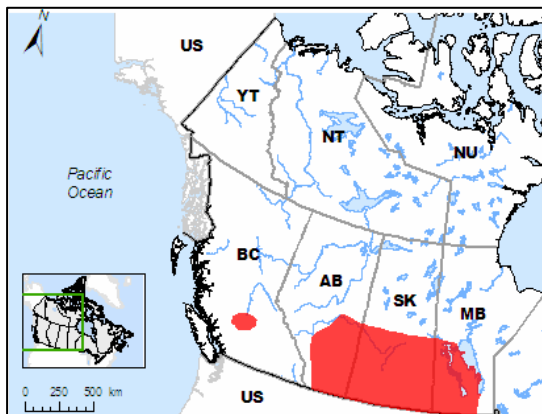


Figure 1. Known distribution of the Sprague's Pipit (*Anthus spragueii*) in Canada.

1) The Nest

Physical Appearance and Context

Sprague's Pipit nests are protected as a residence. Sprague's Pipits are most common in native prairie of intermediate height and density, with few shrubs, and moderate amounts of residual vegetation and plant litter¹. Pipits are rarely found in cultivated lands or in dense permanent cover planted for waterfowl management or soil conservation^{1,5,6,7}. Furthermore, nesting has not been recorded in these habitats. However, pipits can occur regularly in areas where native grasses have been replaced with introduced forage (e.g., hayfields and seeded pastures), if vegetation structure is similar to native prairie^{8,9,10}. Breeding habitat becomes unsuitable immediately after burning, when livestock activity is intense, or when management, or lack thereof results in tall, dense vegetation invaded by shrubs and exotic plants^{11,12,13,14}. The longevity of the impact will vary depending upon moisture, soil, and frequency of disturbance^{11,14}. Native habitat is also degraded when fragmented by human activities¹⁵. In native pastures, nests are located in areas with increased amounts of residual vegetation and taller grasses (~ 20 cm in height)^{16,17}. Pipits avoid placing their nests in recently grazed areas and in areas with a large coverage of bare ground¹⁶.



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Figure 2. Typical Sprague's Pipit nest

The nest is located in a depression below ground level, usually at the base of tussocks of grass, and is composed of coarse and fine grasses woven in a cup¹¹. Long grasses growing beside the nest are typically interwoven to form a dome¹⁸ (Fig. 2). Runways are often located at the nest entrance, and can extend up to 15 cm in length¹⁸. On average, the interior of the nest is 7.6 cm in diameter and 3.8 cm in depth, the entrance hole is 5.1 cm¹⁹. Females lay 2 to 6 eggs (typically 4 or 5) and incubate them for 10-15 days^{1,11,20,21}. The eggs are grayish white to pale buff with olive-brown to purplish-brown markings. They are subelliptical to oval and are approximately 21 x 15 mm¹¹ (Fig. 3).



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Figure 3. Typical Sprague's Pipit eggs.

Function

Nests are essential to the sheltering, incubation, and hatching of eggs, and rearing of young.

Damage and Destruction of the Residence

Any activity that destroys the function of the nest (i.e. site used for laying, incubation, and brood rearing) would constitute damage or destruction of the residence. This would include, but not

limited to, preventing access to the nest, moving/haying or destroying the nest, or removing vegetation immediately adjacent to, and above the nest.

Period and Frequency of Occupancy

Nest building usually begins early to mid-May, and clutches are typically initiated from the second week of May to the end of July, but may extend into August^{11, 22}. The young leave the nest between 10-13 days of age^{11,20}. Each nest is used once and new nests are built for subsequent nesting attempts, typically within 100 m of the original nest^{20,23}. The nest site should remain a residence from the time of construction of the nest until the entire brood leaves the nest (approximately 30 days).

Additional Protection

The Sprague's Pipit, and its nests and eggs, have been protected from hunting and collecting in North America since 1916 by the federal *Migratory Birds Convention Act*. The species is also protected from disturbance under provincial Wildlife Acts in British Columbia²⁴, Alberta (listed as a 'non-game animal')²⁵, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba¹.

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