



Birds

American Pipit

Anthus rubescens

Priority 2 Species of Greatest Conservation Need (SGCN)

Class: Birds (*Aves*)

Order: Perching Birds (*Passeriformes*)

Family: Pipits And Wagtails (*Montacillidae*)



General comments:

The American Pipit is a slender, ground-dwelling songbird with a long tail, delicate bill, and pale brown plumage with subtle streaking. In Maine, it breeds only in the alpine tundra of the state’s highest peaks, primarily around Mount Katahdin, making it one of Maine’s rarest and most elevation-restricted breeding birds. The species nests in open, rocky terrain above treeline, where snow-free ground and sparse vegetation provide suitable conditions. Its long-term persistence in Maine is threatened by climate-driven habitat loss as treelines advance and alpine tundra shrinks. Low numbers and remote breeding sites make American Pipit population trends difficult to monitor.

Species Conservation Range Maps:

Town Map: [Anthus rubescens_Towns.pdf](#)

Subwatershed Map: [Anthus rubescens_HUC12.pdf](#)

SGCN Priority Ranking - Designation Criteria:

Risk of Extirpation:	Maine Status: Endangered	Federal Status: None	IUCN Red List Status: None
High Climate Change Vulnerability:	Vulnerability: 3, Confidence: High, Reviewers: 7		
High Regional Conservation Priority:	NatureServe: Global Rank: G5 State Rank: S2		

Habitat Associations:

Formation: Alpine

Macrogroup: Eastern North American Alpine Tundra

★ Primary Habitat	Habitat System: Acadian-Appalachian Alpine Tundra
	Habitat System: Eastern North American Alpine Tundra Macrogroup - Unknown Habitat System

Threats

Threat Priority Level based on Severity and Actionability		Moderate Severity	High Severity
	Highly Actionable	Medium-High	High
	Moderately Actionable	Medium	Medium-High

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Actionable with Difficulty

Low

Low

IUCN Level 1 Threat Human Intrusions and Disturbance

IUCN Level 2 Threat: Recreational Activities

Severity: Moderate Severity

Actionability: Highly Actionable

Notes: Potential issue but currently unknown if recreational activity on Katahdin poses any major risks. Heavy hiker traffic on alpine trails may cause disturbances leading to abandonment or predation. Nest sites are ground-level and highly exposed, making even low-impact recreation a potential risk in these rare habitats. Additional study is warranted, awareness campaigns and seasonal trail restrictions could mitigate risk.

IUCN Level 1 Threat Other Options

IUCN Level 2 Threat: Lack of knowledge

Severity: Moderate Severity

Actionability: Highly Actionable

Notes: We lack baseline data on breeding phenology, success, and even total population size in Maine. Better data are needed to detect trends and potential extirpation risk, particularly since these alpine populations are small, isolated, and vulnerable to stochastic events (e.g., storms). Monitoring efforts would inform conservation status and climate vulnerability.

IUCN Level 1 Threat Climate Change and Severe Weather

IUCN Level 2 Threat: Habitat Shifting or Alteration

Severity: High Severity

Actionability: Actionable with Difficulty

Notes: The greatest long-term threat to American Pipits in Maine is loss of alpine tundra due to upslope treeline shifts and shrinking snowpack from climate change. Even small encroachments could eliminate breeding habitat on Katahdin.

Species Level Conservation Actions:

Only species specific conservation actions that address high (red) or medium-high (orange) priority threats are summarized here.

Conservation Action	Category	Biological Priority	Type
Monitor the Status of Breeding Populations. Due to the species' limited breeding range in Maine and the inaccessibility of alpine habitat, regular monitoring is needed to determine population trends, breeding success, and possible colonization of other hi	Survey and Monitoring	high	new

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Threat(s) Addressed By This Conservation Action

 Lack of knowledge

Conservation Action	Category	Biological Priority	Type
Investigate breeding ecology and limiting factors in Maine. Detailed local data are lacking. Studies should examine nest success, food availability, predator impacts, and habitat use to inform future conservation decisions.	Research	moderate	new

Threat(s) Addressed By This Conservation Action

 Lack of knowledge

Conservation Action	Category	Biological Priority	Type
Minimize potential recreational impacts in key breeding area. Katahdin is a popular hiking destination. Signage or trail closures (if warranted) could reduce potential disturbance to nesting birds.	Habitat Management	moderate	new

Threat(s) Addressed By This Conservation Action

 Recreational Activities

Conservation Actions Associated with the High Elevation birds Guild:

Conservation Action	Category	Biological Priority	Type
Monitor high-elevation bird populations statewide. Birds in high-elevation habitats are difficult to access and poorly sampled by standard monitoring programs. Targeted, long-term monitoring is needed to track population trends, detect range shifts, and guide conservation priorities.	Survey and Monitoring	high	new

Threat(s) Addressed By This Conservation Action

- Lack of knowledge

Conservation Action	Category	Biological Priority	Type
Model and track climate-driven habitat change. All members of the high-elevation guild are vulnerable to climate-driven shifts in treeline, snowpack, and vegetation structure. Modeling future habitat changes and identifying potential climate refugia are critical for long-term planning and resilience.	Research	high	new

Threat(s) Addressed By This Conservation Action

- Habitat Shifting or Alteration

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Conservation Action	Category	Biological Priority	Type
Limit recreational impacts in sensitive alpine and subalpine areas. Recreational use of Maine's alpine zones is increasing. During the short breeding season, human disturbance can displace birds from critical nesting areas. Trail management, seasonal closures, signage, and visitor education can reduce these pressures and support reproductive success. As recreational infrastructure expands into higher elevations, careful planning is needed to minimize impacts on alpine and subalpine habitats. Conservation partners should coordinate with land managers and developers to avoid key breeding areas during siting or expansion of recreational infrastructure.	Habitat Management	high	new

Threat(s) Addressed By This Conservation Action

- Recreational Activities

Conservation Action	Category	Biological Priority	Type
Protect and manage existing high-elevation forest and alpine habitats. Conservation of existing alpine and subalpine habitats through land acquisition, easements, or management plans will help prevent fragmentation and degradation. These mountaintop areas support rare species that have no alternative habitat in the state.	Habitat Management	critical	new

Threat(s) Addressed By This Conservation Action

- Habitat Shifting or Alteration

Conservation Action	Category	Biological Priority	Type
Support regional research collaborations and species working groups. High-elevation songbirds face heightened vulnerability to climate change across their ranges due to their dependence on limited alpine and subalpine habitat. Collaboration with regional monitoring programs such as Mountain Birdwatch, and participation in species-specific working groups, is essential. These efforts enhance understanding of range-wide population dynamics and ensure Maine's data contributes to coordinated conservation planning.	Survey and Monitoring	high	

Threat(s) Addressed By This Conservation Action

- Lack of knowledge

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Conservation Action	Category	Biological Priority	Type
Avoid siting new wind energy infrastructure in sensitive high-elevation breeding areas. High elevation taxa may be affected by both habitat disturbance and collision risk from wind turbines in subalpine habitats. Avoidance of key nesting areas can reduce direct and indirect impacts.	Habitat Management	moderate	on-going

Threat(s) Addressed By This Conservation Action

- Renewable Energy

Broad Taxonomic Group Conservation Actions:

Additional relevant conservation actions for this species are assigned within broader taxonomic groups in Maine's Wildlife Action Plan: Element 4.

Habitat Based Conservation Actions:

Additional conservation actions that may benefit habitat(s) associated with this species can be found in Maine's Wildlife Action Plan: Element 4. Click on the Habitat Grouping of interest to launch a habitat based report summarizing relevant conservation actions and associated SGCN.

The Wildlife Action Plan was developed through a lengthy participatory process with state agencies, targeted conservation partners, and the general public. The Plan is non-regulatory. The species, threats, and voluntary conservation actions identified in the Plan complement, but do not replace, existing work